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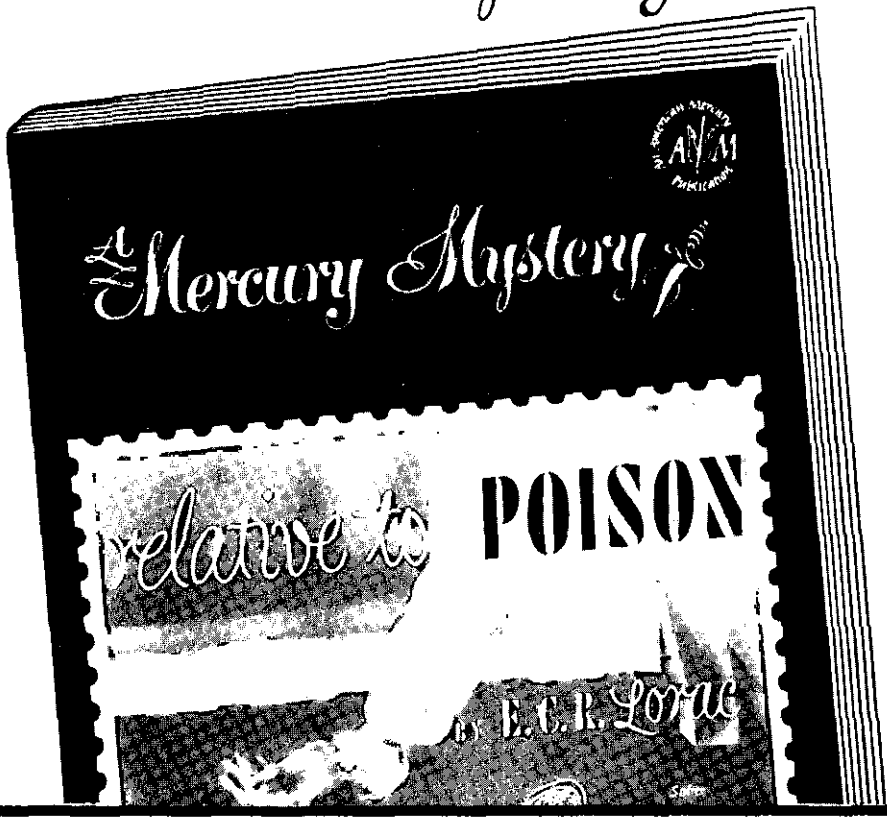

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, EQMM will award five (5) Second Prizes of $500 each, and five (5) Third Prizes of $300 each. All prizes include publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at EQMM's regular rates.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1949.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1949. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1950.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $35 for the original edition, $25 for reprint editions, $25 for British book anthology rights, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

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WINNER OF A SPECIAL AWARD: Q. PATRICK

Q. Patrick has won a prize in all four EQMM contests to date — and may they continue to, ad infinitum. The four prizewinning stories are, from every possible standpoint, a quality quartet — "Witness for the Prosecution," "Love Comes to Miss Lucy," "Mother, May I Go Out to Swim?" and now, "Thou Lord Seest Me." Indeed, we wonder seriously if many detective-story writers can match that foursome with short stories produced in the last four years . . .

The title of this year's tale derives, of course, from the Bible. The original wording, in the 16th chapter of Genesis, 13, reads: Thou God seest me. This was a popular text chosen by makers of Victorian samplers — remember seeing them framed, on parlor tables and on walls? — but for some reason difficult to analyze the sampler-makers could not bring themselves to use the word God. So, it became: Thou Lord Seest Me — and in that form started Q. Patrick on their creative labors.

The more obvious sources of the story are twofold: a trip to England during the war and a brooding on the human need for love. The terrible food shortage in London suggested a plot in which the authors could show how lack of food and the great longing for it can disrupt family life and bring about a whole complex of antagonisms in a society hitherto accustomed to relative plenty. But this larger theme got sidetracked when the authors noticed an ordinary, shabby, dispirited little office worker getting into a bus to go home; the vision of this little man's probable home life, with a probably dreary wife, in a probably dreary suburb — and lo, the character of Mr. Loomis was born — the little office worker who craved affection so deeply that . . . But we must not tell too much.

In the cauldron of creation the food shortage was mixed in, and the text of the Victorian sampler, and a fantasy of love, and a golden santonin world. Not the Shakespearean brew of eye of newt, and toe of frog, wool of bat, and tongue of dog, but boiling i' the charmed pot you will find the one ingredient which remains constant — the poison'd seeds of murder . . .

THOU LORD SEEST ME

by Q. PATRICK

THE office clock struck five. Mr. Loomis looked up at it and frowned. Mr. Loomis hated and feared five o'clock as most men fear death. And for him it was the death of each day's life since it meant leaving the

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office. It was only in the office that Mr. Loomis felt himself a man of stature and importance.

He closed his ledger and with a little sigh carried it over to the safe. He spent as long as he could tidying up his already meticulous desk. He arranged his pencils in a neat row, first vertical then changing them to horizontal; he shuffled his inkpots and next went to fetch his hat and coat. As he appeared from the cloakroom, wearing his old bowler and his black coat with its worn velveteen collar, he looked like any tired little man in post-blitz London. His mustache was frayed like his cuffs; his front teeth needed attention; and he stooped too much for a man of fifty.

His office day was over. Now there remained only the pleasure of saying good night to Miss Henderson. Mr. Loomis hastened his footsteps slightly as, passing downstairs, he saw there was still a light in Mr. Tinker's office. Rose Henderson was secretary to the president. She was also sales manager and occasionally — for Tinker and Smythe dealt largely in patent medicines for children — Mother's Service Manager. The latter term was used when she signed letters dealing with the Croup Elixir or the Worm Eliminant which were two of the firm's best sellers.

"Been kept busy, Miss Henderson?" It was the usual formula repeated almost daily for years.

"So, so, Mr. Loomis. I'm just finishing off a few letters."

Rose Henderson looked up and smiled, showing almost perfect teeth. Unfortunately they were her only really good feature. Her nose was too wide and behind their rimless glasses, her eyes were too small. Her hair always looked like the nest of a clean but untidy heron. Nevertheless, Mr. Loomis liked her appearance.

In fact, being an incurable romantic, he had been perhaps a shade in love with her for quite a number of years. Oh, it was a perfectly respectable sentiment, for Mr. Loomis was very much a married man. Indeed, he would not have known Miss Henderson's Christian name had he not, as the firm's cashier, had to make out a salary check to Rose K. Henderson every month. Sometimes he wondered what the K. stood for.

It had all started with the faded snapshot of herself which Miss Henderson had showed to Mr. Loomis, just for a lark, about ten years ago, at the picnic celebrating Mr. Tinker's wedding. It portrayed bare-legged little Rosie Henderson at the age of eight, happily sucking a stick of candy rock on the sands of Burnham-on-Sea. Mr. Loomis had purloined this picture shamelessly and kept it face downward in a locked drawer of his desk at home. Occasionally, he took it out and thought to himself how Miss Henderson, who must now be about forty, should by rights be the mother of several little girls who looked just like that. And perhaps he thought that if he and Miss Henderson . . .

But, no. It must be repeated that

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Mr. Loomis was married to a most estimable and faithful wife whose lips had never touched liquor, tobacco, or those of any man but her husband.

"Well, good night, Mr. Loomis."

"Good night, Miss Henderson."

Mr. Loomis put on his bowler again and passed out into the thick miasma which is Clerkenwell on a January evening. He saw with some satisfaction that there was quite a long queue waiting for the Pimlico bus. With any luck he would miss the first one, possibly the second, and thus delay the ineluctable moment when he would have to knock on his front door and find himself at home.

As he waited, his fingers ran mechanically through his pockets. The contents would have disgraced any self-respecting schoolboy. There were two lumps of sugar, the rock cake (twopence extra) carefully saved from his tea. There was also a cough lozenge, half a biscuit wrapped in an old invoice and two of the firm's medium-sized manila envelopes. Into one of these Mr. Loomis squeezed his squirrel hoard with some satisfaction, for these fragments were offerings intended for the gratification of his most recently acquired "daughter."

Mr. Loomis, a father who had missed his vocation, adored little girls. He had had scores of "daughters" and he had wooed them in scores of different ways. There was blue-eyed Lucy Green of the ringlets whose heart he had won with fretwork toys made secretly in his own tiny workshop. There was short-haired, freckle-faced Belinda Wren (now a mother herself) for whom he had ransacked his wife's ragbag to make stuffed dolls and teddy bears. There were many others, plain and pretty, whose faces had lit up eagerly at the sight of Daddy "Bloomers."

His latest love was Dinah Milton who had recently come to live with her mother in the house next door. She was a wisp of a child with an appetite which would have done credit to a regiment of guardsmen. But Mr. Loomis saw her skinny little frame through rosy spectacles for she reminded him a tiny bit — oh, such a tiny bit — of the little girl whose faded snapshot he kept locked in his drawer.

There was something particularly touching about Dinah's greediness because the shortage of food in England was hard on hungry little girls. An added bond was the fact that Mrs. Loomis disapproved monumentally of the easy-going habits of Dinah's mother. That she disapproved of Dinah herself went without saying. Mrs. Loomis' childlessness had not made her sympathetic toward the offspring of others.

The bus disgorged Mr. Loomis at last and he made his way through the gloom of the familiar streets, past little brick houses, all alike, until he reached the one which was called his home.

He slowly climbed the steps and gave an almost inaudible rap on the

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knocker. He was not trusted with a latchkey of his own.

The door was opened by his wife, a large, not uncomely woman with a complexion, once peach-like, now purpling to damson plum.

"You're late, Loomis," she said in the voice of one who has said the same thing many times before. "Kept late at the office, I suppose?"

"No, no, my dear." Mr. Loomis pecked hurriedly at the damson of his wife's cheek. "It's these bus queues. Really, I don't know what London's coming to."

He moved crabwise to hang his coat and hat in the hall cupboard, fearful lest his wife's x-ray eye might detect the contraband in his pocket.

"Well, don't blame me if dinner's burnt to a crisp." Mrs. Loomis turned her broad back and flounced into the kitchen, while her husband made his way into the parlor where he drew a box of matches from his pocket and lit the wall gas-bracket. Electricity had not yet reached this particular section of London.

Mr. Loomis sat down gingerly on one of the hard chairs by the small gas fire which he did not dare to light until after the evening meal. He surveyed the room gloomily without noticing that it was, as usual, scrupulously clean and scrupulously tidy. He knew only that it was scrupulously dull.

His eyes settled on the framed wool text above the mantel — THOU LORD SEEST ME.

"Loomis, dinner's on the table."

Mr. Loomis rose obediently and after retrieving the manila envelopes from his overcoat in the hall closet, passed into the tiny dining-room. There was a clean cloth on a neatly set table which bore a whale steak smothered with onions. There was also a dish of fried potatoes, another of Brussel sprouts, and bread, and margarine. It was as good a dinner, so Mrs. Loomis averred every evening, as they were sitting down to in Buckingham Palace.

It was also a familiar dinner. And his wife's dinnertime conversation was equally familiar. Mr. Loomis only half listened as Mabel told of her indomitable prowess in pushing to the head of the butcher's queue; of her tactical success in wheedling a little extra flour from the grocer; of the shocking moral laxity of her neighbors in general and, in particular, of Mrs. Milton next door.

". . . bottles and bottles of beer . . . men at all hours of the day and night . . . that brat of hers . . . it's my belief she's no better than her mother. Sitting on our garden wall with her bare legs hanging down . . . at this time of year . . . bare skinny legs . . ."

While Mr. Loomis chewed his Antarctic Steak, vague sentimental pictures passed through his mind of little Dinah Milton on the wall, waiting hopefully for the tidbits that he always tried to bring home for her. Incongruously, the bare skinny legs merged into another pair of childish legs as seen in a discolored photo-

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graph snapped at Burnham-on-Sea.

"Bare legs in January!" Mrs. Loomis had risen heavily and started to remove the plates. It was one of her many admirable qualities that she seldom allowed her husband in the kitchen. This virtue, however, rendered far more difficult Mr. Loomis' task of stealing morsels for his insatiable pet cormorant next door. He took advantage of his wife's absence to slip a small square of bread and margarine from his plate into the manila envelope in his pocket.

Mrs. Loomis returned from the kitchen bearing a dish of six delicious-looking jam tarts. As she withdrew again for the inevitable custard, her husband made some lightning calculations. Dare he risk stealing a tart now? No, Mabel was not, as he well knew, like the proverbial mother bird who can count only to two or three. Perhaps he could claim that an overwhelming greed had constrained him to pop one of them into his mouth without waiting for her. No, alas. For she knew only too well that greed was not one of his weaknesses and this would only be inviting suspicion.

But his luck was in. Mrs. Loomis was so carried away by the iniquities of Dinah and her mother that she noticed nothing. By the end of dinner Mr. Loomis had been able to secrete one and three-quarter tarts in the manila envelope.

Now every sensible wife will agree — and many who are not so sensible — that there comes a time in a man's day, usually in the evening after supper, when he should feel free to go around to the nearest pub and discuss a game of darts with the boys over a pint or two of mild and bitter. But Mrs. Loomis believed that the place for the husband, when not safely in his office, was definitely at home. And Mr. Loomis, whether he believed it or not, was obliged to agree with her. This evening he sat in his chair before the now-lit gas fire and pretended to listen to his wife's daily recital of her own perfections. In fact, he was not listening; his thoughts were wandering along unexpected and incurably romantic avenues.

Lately they had been walking these avenues with increasing frequency, but they had taken the first step into this make-believe land some years ago, after his wife had discovered the doll's house he had made for little Lucy Green and had insisted on presenting it herself — not to Lucy Green — but to some orphanage which she helped piously to support. Mr. Loomis' anger had been none the less violent for being unexpressed, nor had it been quick to fade. The next morning, as he took his ledgers out of the office safe, his eyes had settled on a small green bottle which stood on the poison shelf. On its label they had traced the word Santonin.

Now Mr. Loomis was not a chemist, but he liked to think that his long association with Tinker and Smythe had given him a little more knowledge of drugs than that normally possessed by the layman. Mr. Loomis knew

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that minute quantities of santonin were used in the firm's Worm Eliminant. He also knew that it was a poison — a powerful but rarely used poison whose effects might well baffle the normal medical practitioner familiar with the toxic symptoms produced by arsenic, cyanide, or strychnine.

From that day on the small green bottle had become very important in Mr. Loomis' day dreams. They were nothing but dreams, of course — daring fantasies in which, by some eccentric accident, the bottle of santonin and Mabel. . . . These thoughts remained in Mr. Loomis' mind as unfinished symphonies.

Now, as his wife's voice ground relentlessly on, colored reveries floated before him — little Dinah Milton and a jam tart, little Rosie Henderson and the stick of candy rock, Mabel and the little green bottle. . . .

At last the time came for Mrs. Loomis to retire, which left Mr. Loomis a chance to retire also — not at once to the conjugal bed, but to the small den which was the one place he could almost call his own. Here he was planning to prepare the parcels of scraps for delivery to Dinah Milton.

Just as he was entering the den, he heard his wife's voice from the bathroom.

"Light the gas and the gas fire in the bedroom, Loomis. And shut the windows. It's turned a bit nippy."

Mr. Loomis did as he was bid and then, having also lit the gas-bracket in his den, sat down at his small, home-made desk. With one ear cocked toward the bathroom, he drew out the manila envelopes and made two neat piles of the foodstuffs they contained. That done, he returned them to their envelopes which he wrapped around with string. Then, measuring off about ten feet of slack, he lowered the parcels out of the window so that they dangled a few feet above his wife's chrysanthemum bed below.

With a pleasant tingle of excitement he gave a long, low whistle to signify to his young conspirator next door that the coast was clear.

Almost at once a small nightgowned form appeared at an open attic window in the Milton house.

"All right, Daddy Bloomers?" whispered Dinah.

For an answer Mr. Loomis jigged the food packages up and down on the end of the string, and Dinah disappeared from the window.

Mr. Loomis knew that this method of delivery was melodramatic and quite unnecessarily dangerous, but he employed it because it made him feel that he and Dinah were living in some fairy tale, a prince and princess banded together against the wicked ogress who might at any minute pop out and catch them red-handed. This was the only spice to his home life; it brought a heightening of every sensation — somewhat similar to that which he had felt during the worst days of the London blitz.

At length a small white figure

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emerged from the back door of the Milton house. Dinah scrambled over the wall which separated the two gardens. Crouching in the shadows like an experienced commando, the little girl ran to the chrysanthemum bed where she trampled relentlessly over the plants in her eagerness.

Sitting angler-fashion at the window, Mr. Loomis felt a tug on his line and released the string. Immediately, he heard the kitchen door slam and his heart missed a beat as he saw the figure of his wife standing, large and formidable, in the narrow pathway, blocking Dinah's sole avenue of escape.

For a moment the child stood irresolute; then, deciding to make a dash for it, she crouched again and ran under Mrs. Loomis' outstretched arm.

But that lady was too quick for her. Sensing her opponent's strategy, she pounced with surprising agility and grabbed Dinah by the tails of her flowing nightgown.

"Caught you, my fine miss," she panted. "Trampling on my chrysanthemums." She swung her free hand and delivered several hard slaps to Dinah's face and head. "Thief! Wicked, little thief!"

Quivering with outrage, Mr. Loomis shouted, but his voice did not seem to carry. He rushed into the bedroom, tugged open the window just above his wife's head and cried:

"Stop it, Mabel. Stop it at once! The child is not stealing. I told her she might come over."

Surprised by this unexpected attack, Mrs. Loomis looked up, momentarily weakening her grasp. Dinah was quick to seize her opportunity. Wriggling herself free and leaving a large piece of her nightgown in her captor's hand, she dropped her packages and made for the dividing wall as if all the trolls of Grimm and Andersen were after her.

"I'll deal with you in a minute, Loomis."

But Mr. Loomis' only reply was to slam down the bedroom window. He hardly noticed that he shattered a pane of glass as he did so. Angrier than he had ever been in his life, he withdrew to his den for the inevitable encounter.

Soon Mrs. Loomis swept up the stairs, carrying the two manila envelopes and trailing the string behind her like the tail of a comet. Her face was blotched with purple wrath.

"Food!" she screamed. "*My* food! Giving my food to that skinny little daughter of a cheap . . ."

The words exploded in a violent hiccough. Mabel had been addicted to hiccoughs recently and they were almost the only force strong enough to stem her overflowing indignation.

"It's only scraps," cried Mr. Loomis. "I wasn't hungry."

"Scraps! My jam tarts — scraps!"

Mrs. Loomis just managed to expel these words, but they were destined to be her swan song, for now a veritable hurricane of hiccoughing swept over her. Muttering something about: "My indigestion — now see what

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you've done," she hiccoughed her way out of the den and into the bathroom where, Mr. Loomis knew, she was taking the sedative which Dr. Heather had prescribed for her last week. In a few moments he heard her go into the bedroom where she slammed and locked the door noisily behind her.

Mrs. Loomis, being an old-fashioned type, believed that the most effective way to punish a husband was to deny him physical access to her person. It is perhaps superfluous to state that, for Mr. Loomis, this was no punishment but a blessed relief, even though it meant a choice between the unmade bed in the spare room or (an alternative which he infinitely preferred) the narrow couch in his den.

But Mr. Loomis felt by no means ready for bed. Indignation had given him unwonted courage. Those carefully hoarded morsels were meant for Dinah. Dinah should have them. He scooped up the crumbled remnants of food and put them back into the envelopes. Then, without even bothering to go on tiptoe past the bedroom door, he made his way down to the kitchen pantry where he found the two remaining jam tarts. Defiantly he put these also into one of the envelopes and proceeded to the house of his next-door neighbor.

His ring at the bell was answered by a rather pretty little woman with a crumpled pink dress and a great deal of crumpled pinkish hair. Her face was heavily cosmeticized, but her eyes, smiling and friendly, gave her an expression of almost childlike naïveté.

"Oh, hello," she said. "You're Mr. Bloomers from next door, aren't you? Do come in."

Mr. Loomis followed her into the hall, stammered an apology for his wife's action, offered the manila envelopes for Dinah and expressed a hope that she was none the worse for the encounter.

"So that's what all the shindig was about!" Mrs. Milton gave a careless laugh and peeped into one of the envelopes. "Oh, my! Jam tarts. What's a box or two on the ears if you get jam tarts? I'll pop 'em up to Dinah while you make yourself comfy in there."

She indicated the open door of the living room which, when he entered it, was warm and cosy, smelling pleasantly like an inn parlor. The wireless was going merrily and there were several bottles of beer, some full, some empty, on the center table. An enormous man rose to his feet.

"Name of Potts," he said, holding out a large, horny hand. "Al Potts and pleased to meet you."

Mr. Loomis murmured his name and indicated that the pleasure was mutual.

"So you're Bloomers, eh? Mamie's Dinah don't talk of nothing but her Daddy Bloomers." Al Potts winked and poured out a tumbler of beer. "Here, have a drink, Bloomers."

For a moment Mr. Loomis hesitated. He had not touched any

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alcoholic beverage since his fire-watching days. But this had turned out to be a new, reckless type of evening.

"Thank you, Mr. Potts. I could do with a drop."

As he seated himself and sipped at his beer, Al continued: "She's a greedy kid, Dinah, but you can't blame 'em these days. We none of us get enough solids. But I myself am more of a one for the liquids." He laughed heartily at his own joke and then drained his glass.

Mrs. Milton returned to the room. "Dinah says thank Daddy Bloomers and give him a big kiss." She looked archly at Al. "What would you say if I was to do it, Al?"

Al grunted good-naturedly.

"And she sent another message to another party with words in it a kid didn't ought to know, so I told her to hush her mouth and eat up her tarts."

The beer was making Mr. Loomis a trifle giddy. "Mabel had no business to slap the child. I told her off myself. Yes, I told her off good and proper." Mr. Loomis expanded his meager chest.

"You did?" queried Mamie admiringly.

"I certainly did. And she went off to bed and — she locked the door."

Mamie said: "Well, I never." Al refilled Mr. Loomis' glass. As the warmth engendered by the beer increased, Mr. Loomis felt that the "telling-off" was worth enlarging upon. It was gratifying and unfamiliar to have a sympathetic audience. Their casual friendliness was most gratifying too. Soon they were all chatting with pleasant intimacy. Al, who was a small-time contractor, expressed his dissatisfaction with current conditions in England and announced that he had decided to immigrate to Australia. With a broad grin he confided that he was trying to persuade Mamie to marry him and come along. Mamie laughed and called him "a card" and "a caution." Later, after another round of beer, she sat on his lap. It was so free and relaxing. Mr. Loomis found it delightful.

And all the time, adding a touch of rhapsody, was the thought of the little girl, her hunger sated by jam tarts, curled happily asleep upstairs, dreaming, perhaps, of her Daddy Bloomers.

In his own happiness Mr. Loomis lost count of time and was only brought back to a sense of the hour when a voice on the wireless announced the familiar nightly message:

"Residents of the Pimlico district are warned again that, because of the present coal crisis, the gas will be shut off at the main in three minutes — that is at eleven o'clock. Service will be resumed at 5:30 tomorrow morning. If your gas is on now — whether for lighting, cooking, or heating — turn it off immediately."

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Loomis in a happy haze, "eleven o'clock already. I declare. I had no idea."

Despite his hostess' coaxing offer of

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a nightcap, Mr. Loomis took his leave and let himself into his own cold, dark hall. The familiar chilliness and the knowledge that instead of the slumbering Dinah, Mabel lay asleep upstairs, did not cool his exhilaration. Mabel, he knew, would become a reality in the morning. But now was now. He groped his way up the stairs and through the darkness of his den to the couch where he fell into a warm sleep.

Dreams of children lulled him all night, culminating with a dream in which he was walking on the sands of Burnham-on-Sea with Dinah clutching one hand and little Rosie Henderson clutching the other. Both little girls were sucking gay pink sticks of candy rock. They romped together on the sands; they paddled; they made castles; they rode donkeys.

Then something went wrong with the dream. A great purple cloud formed over the sea. It began to swoop toward them. The little girls, scuffing and dancing, seemed to notice nothing. Mr. Loomis knew that it was some new horrible form of gas invasion. He tried to shout out to warn them:

"The gas . . . the gas . . ."

But his voice would not sound. He heaved himself up in a mighty effort to throw off the dream tentacles that held him immobile. Then, conscious of a bump, he woke up to find himself on the floor, having rolled off his narrow couch in his struggles.

Vaguely he looked at his watch and saw in the thin early light that it was twenty-five minutes to six. He sat up on the floor and sniffed. Still half in the dream, he was certain he could smell gas. All nonsense, of course. But was it nonsense? Mr. Loomis held his breath and listened. Yes, there was no doubt about it. He could detect a faint hissing from the neighborhood of the gas-bracket above his desk. The smell was growing stronger too. In a flash he remembered the unfamiliar pleasures of last night. Before going over to the Miltons', he had lit the gas in his den, but in his rapturous return he had forgotten, since the company had stopped the flow, that the tap was still on. He ran to the wall and turned it off at the bracket. The hissing ceased. Then he threw the window wide open, admitting cold gusts of morning air.

Feeling shaky but rather important from such a near brush with disaster, Mr. Loomis put on his carpet slippers and dressing gown, went out into the passage, and closed the den door. As was his regular custom, he proceeded to the kitchen and filled the kettle preparatory to making morning tea, a cup of which he habitually took to his wife in bed.

As he applied a lighted match to the gas ring, another chord was struck in his memory. Last night, before the quarrel, he had, at his wife's request, lit the gas fire in the bedroom. Mabel was a sound sleeper who fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow. It was her invariable habit to leave the gas

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burning for him to turn off when he came to bed which, in normal circumstances, was far earlier than the gas company's deadline of eleven o'clock. In addition, she had last night taken one of the sedatives prescribed by Dr. Heather. Even though she had locked the door against him, it was more than likely that she had fallen asleep without remembering to turn off the gas fire.

Acting on automatic reflex, Mr. Loomis was out of the kitchen in a twinkling and running anxiously up the stairs. He reached the bedroom door and standing breathless on the thick woolen mat at its threshold, tried the handle.

It did not yield.

"Mabel," he called. "Mabel."

There was no reply.

Mr. Loomis sniffed. His nostrils were still tainted by the odor of gas from the den, but there was unquestionably another leak here. It came from the crack beneath the bedroom door. Mabel always slept with the windows closed. She was lying in there suffocating to death.

"Mabel!"

Mr. Loomis rattled ineffectually at the door knob and then spun around for something with which to break down the heavy wood panels. Panic came and went. Its place was taken by a strange feeling almost of awe, as if Mr. Loomis were in the presence of Destiny herself.

Mabel had locked the door against him. Mamie and Al were aware of this fact. It was Mabel herself who had been responsible for all the trivial little actions which had led to this moment. His private dream of the santonin bottle — even at its most roseate — had always involved some impossibly aggressive act from Mr. Loomis himself. But here was the dream in reality. By the obscure workings of Destiny, Mabel and the santonin bottle — disguised now as a gas fire — had met, and in such a manner that no overt act was demanded from him. No act, no courage, no skill — no risk.

For a long moment Mr. Loomis stood quite still. Slowly he felt a terrible secret pleasure stir and scurry through him like a mouse.

Deliberately, he stooped. He picked up the pink and brown mat, decorated with roses, which Mabel had worked on before The War. He pushed it forward so that it tightly blocked the air passage between the bottom of the door and the floorboards.

He stood for another moment, sniffing the pungent but diminished odor, feeling a sensation far headier than the fisherman's thrill when Dinah had tugged at the string. Then he returned to the kitchen and made a pot of tea. He carried it into the living-room and sat down with it in the least uncomfortable chair. The bleak morning light revealed the embroidered text hanging above the fireplace. THOU LORD SEEST ME. Mr. Loomis crossed to it and carefully turned its face to the wall. He sat down again and picked up his tea cup.

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He felt larger, somehow, than he had ever felt in his life.

One will never know — one cannot even imagine — what were the thoughts that passed through Dr. Crippen's mind immediately after he had killed his wife and disposed of her remains in the cellar. One shudders from speculating on the images which drifted through the warped brain of George Joseph Smith after he had drowned his various brides in cheap tin bathtubs. The murderer's mind is a closed book, not to be opened by the impious fingers of average citizens like ourselves who have perhaps never been tempted to perpetrate this, the most spectacular and usually the most heinous, of all crimes. And so one cannot, one dare not, try to delineate with any accuracy the mental processes of Mr. Loomis as he sat there in his unfriendly but scrupulously tidy living-room, sipping his second and then his third cup of early morning tea.

Perhaps he thought merely of the absurdly convincing story he would tell the authorities when they came to investigate; perhaps he brooded on the humiliations, the soul privations he had suffered at his wife's hands; perhaps he dreamed of Miss Henderson, of a vaguely happy future with a dynasty of little girls which they might found together; or perhaps he merely toyed with the new, immensely exotic realization that he was a murderer — that by moving a mat rather than breaking a door, he had joined irrevocably that twilight confederacy of wife-slayers along with Crippen, Smith, Greenwood, Armstrong, and Landru.

As he sat there, while the noises of London started to clatter outside, he glanced every now and then at his watch. Six o'clock . . . six twenty . . . six forty-five . . . Mabel always arose to make breakfast at seven. What would be thought later if her husband had not detected the disaster by that hour?

Mr. Loomis put down his tea cup. He moved into the hall. He glanced nervously up the stairs. Anxiety, almost identical with genuine concern for his wife, seized him. Hardly knowing whether he was play-acting or not, Mr. Loomis rushed out of the house, ran to the Milton's front door, and started to bang on it. At length Mamie appeared in a crumpled wrapper, her pinkish hair disheveled.

"Quick . . ." gasped Mr. Loomis. "My wife . . . gas . . . door locked. Phone Doctor Heather . . . quick."

Mamie grasped an emergency. "Al, come down," she screamed.

She was on the phone when Al rolled sleepily downstairs, buttoning his trousers as he came. In a few seconds the two men were back in Mr. Loomis' house.

"This door here," panted Mr. Loomis outside his wife's room. "She locked it. I told you . . . the gas . . ."

He smelt the gas; he saw Al's great bulk lurch against the locked door; he heard the hinges creak. But

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suddenly all this seemed a spectacle fulfilling itself in some remote region of space. Once again Al hurled himself against the door. Mr. Loomis heard the splintering of wood, was conscious of a strengthening of the smell of gas.

Then, brown and pink, the roses of the mat loomed toward him and struck him in the face.

When he came to himself, he was lying on the small, uncomfortable sofa in the living-room downstairs. He was conscious of mental confusion and a vague dread. He was conscious too of Mamie seated by him and bathing his aching forehead. Directly in his path of vision was the text above the mantel. Someone must have turned it around, for THOU LORD SEEST ME stared back at him.

"There, there." He was aware of the pungent odor of spirits beneath his nostrils. "Come on now. Take a sup of this."

Mr. Loomis gulped down a mouthful of brandy. He managed to ask: "Is — is Mabel all right?"

Mamie looked down at him and he saw that her good-natured brown eyes were filled with pity.

"It's best you hear it from me instead of the doctor. She's gone, poor soul."

In the tangle of Mr. Loomis' emotions the principal feeling was wonder. Mabel, the seemingly indestructible, was dead. The thing he had cherished as an impossible dream had actually happened. And now that he had helped to bring it about, he saw with perverse clarity that this was the only success of his life. He had failed as a husband and as a father; he had failed even to amount to anything really important at Tinker and Smythe. It had been left to him to find his true niche as a murderer.

A little murderer, perhaps, a mat-pushing murderer. But a successful one.

The secret joy, which had come at the moment when he first paused outside the bedroom door, seeped through him again. Who could say now that he was a poor little man?

Mamie had taken his hand and was murmuring to him vague inarticulate sounds of comfort. He yielded luxuriously to her pity.

A few moments later Dr. Heather entered the room. Mr. Loomis, who had not before seen his wife's new physician, gathered an impression of a solemn young man with a formal face and a precise voice which said:

"I want you to know, Mr. Loomis, that you have my deepest sympathy. I also want to reassure you. Mr. Potts has told me of your — ah — little domestic squabble last night. He is afraid that you may feel responsible for the fact that the gas was not turned off and hence for the — ah — tragedy itself."

Mr. Loomis found the young man's pedantic mode of speech difficult to follow. He sat up on the couch, peering in bewilderment.

"In the first place," continued the

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doctor, "there was a pane of glass broken in the window. This in itself would have prevented a sufficient concentration of gas to prove lethal. But, as it happens, we may dismiss the gas. Your wife did not die from asphyxiation."

Mr. Loomis at last understood the words and there rushed back to him a picture of himself the night before banging down the sash after he had shouted to Mabel from the window. Yes, of course, he had broken the pane. Blankly he ventured: "She didn't die . . . ?"

"Not from asphyxiation. As you know, your wife consulted me a few days ago for what she believed to be indigestion. I examined her and suspected a serious heart condition. I prescribed sedatives and advised her strongly against all exertion or excitement. The episode with the little girl last night must have proved too much for her. She must have had a heart attack soon after she locked herself into the bedroom. She had certainly been dead several hours before the gas started to escape."

Mr. Loomis, listening and understanding, began to shiver. Mamie put a consoling arm around him.

"And so," went on Dr. Heather in the tone he had cultivated for sad occasions, "you have no reason to blame yourself for negligence. And, if on the strength of your little disagreement last night, you should be in doubt as to your wife's affections, I can lay your mind at rest on that score also. When I informed her of her heart condition, she insisted that no mention should be made to you. You had your worries at the office, she said. She did not wish to give you any extra anxiety." He laid a rather cold hand on Mr. Loomis' sleeve. "She was a good woman."

There was more — much more. Dr. Heather seemed to talk interminably about a death certificate, about the fact that an inquest would not be necessary, about funeral arrangements. There were countless telephone calls and through it all, Mamie and Al, friendly and comforting, handled everything. Mr. Loomis, coddled with cups of tea and nips of brandy, got through the day in a state of suspended animation.

But at last it was all over and he was alone. He stood in the middle of the room with his arms limp at his sides. The gray evening light, peering through the window, seemed to muse over the framed wool text above the mantel. Suddenly feeling started again with the violence of a bullet tearing through his flesh.

He had not been a success as a murderer.

He had been a grotesque failure. Mabel had died, as she had lived, on her own initiative. He had been a foolish little man, inflated with self-importance, pushing a mat around ineffectually as a child might push a toy.

The doctor's voice came back to him:

She did not wish to give you any extra anxiety. She was a good woman.

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Mr. Loomis felt dry and hollow as an autumn seedpod. He gazed in agony at the text in front of him.

It was a lie. Even God couldn't see him. He was too small.

Everyone was very kind. Tinker and Smythe insisted upon a two weeks' vacation. Miss Henderson wrote a little note of condolence. Dinah Milton, now that the ogress was laid to rest in the Pimlico cemetery, gamboled at will between the two houses. Since Mamie, at best a slipshod mother, was more and more preoccupied with Al, there were blissful hours in which Mr. Loomis could take the little girl walking in Kensington Gardens and gorge her at Lyons' Tea Shops.

Gradually he began to believe that the Destiny, which had denied him stature, might also yield him rewards.

But on the last night of his holiday, after he had read Dinah to sleep with *Black Beauty*, this new budding hope was brutally destroyed. Al and Mamie, their faces shining with happiness and Bass, announced the fact that Mamie had finally decided to marry Al. They would immigrate together. The boat for Australia was sailing soon and Al's papers would suffice for his wife and Dinah.

Mr. Loomis managed to twitter his congratulations but as he lay sleepless and alone in his conjugal bed, he felt all the pangs of disenchantment. Dinah had been a shining prize dangled before him only to be snatched away. The future stretched ahead of him bitterly empty.

But slowly, daringly, the thought of Rose Henderson came to comfort him. Romantic images stole through him as he tossed against the pillows. Miss Henderson looking up from her desk, showing her fine white teeth in a smile of pleasure at his return next day to the office. Miss Henderson's shy acknowledgement as he thanked her for her letter. Miss Henderson, perhaps, across the table from him in a little restaurant. "*Oh, Mr. Loomis, all these years I've waited, but I never thought . . .*"

Why not? Why shouldn't it happen? Hadn't the dream of the santonin bottle come true? These new fantasies explored the future with a delicious sense of certainty.

Mr. Loomis crept out of bed and fumbled the photograph from his wallet. He did not need to turn on the gas to remember every detail of that childish body, those wistful eyes and the solemn face absorbed with the candy rock.

He put the photograph under his pillow and drifted into a soothing sleep.

At precisely a quarter to two the next afternoon Mr. Loomis passed the open door of Mr. Tinker's office and saw, as he had hoped, that Miss Henderson was standing by the desk, sorting papers. He stepped across the threshold and she glanced up.

"Oh, Mr. Loomis, I didn't see you."

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Mr. Loomis wasn't seeing her, either. He was seeing something which he had built out of dreams, a never-never-land creature at once a little bare-legged girl and the mother of other little bare-legged girls yet to come.

"I wish to thank you for your letter of sympathy, Miss Henderson. I deeply appreciated it."

Miss Henderson flushed a heavy pink. "Oh, of course I had to write."

It was all beginning in a fashion so similar to Mr. Loomis' imaginary dialogue that he drifted even further into unreality. He was not the recently widowed cashier and she was not Miss Rose K. Henderson, Mother's Service Manager. They were characters in a debonair romance.

"I was wondering, Miss Henderson, if you would do me the great pleasure of dining with me one night."

Miss Henderson's flush was an unbecoming carmine now. "Well, I mean, I am sure it would be very nice. But I live with my mother. She's old and not very strong. I always . . ."

"A little French restaurant," continued Mr. Loomis, his mating gallantry undisturbed. "In Soho perhaps. A quiet little dinner. Wine."

Miss Henderson patted nervously at the heron's nest above her thick spectacles. "Wine? I never touch wine, Mr. Loomis. And, really, I mean, isn't it rather premature? So soon, I mean, after your wife . . ."

"I have kept this," confided Mr. Loomis, producing the photograph from his wallet. "A dear little girl with bare legs."

"Really!" Miss Henderson snatched the photograph from him. "Really, Mr. Loomis!"

The tone of her voice edged into Mr. Loomis' reverie. Dimly he was aware that the dialogue was not progressing as it should. He blinked and, actually looking at her for the first time, saw the awkward flush, the eyes, prudish and outraged behind the opaque lenses, watching him as if suspicious of his sobriety.

"Miss Henderson, I was not suggesting anything . . ."

"Really, Mr. Loomis, this is most embarrassing. I think it would be better if we forgot the whole episode."

There they were. The words were spoken. They could not be taken back. Mr. Loomis accepted their inevitability, and with that clarity which now seemed so often to plague him, he realized that this last dream had also been meaningless. It was too late to search for the little girl of the photograph in the barren middle-aged spinster which was the reality of Rose K. Henderson — thirty years too late.

"Yes, Miss Henderson," he said meekly, much as in the old days he had said: "Yes, Mabel."

Still icily clear in his mind, he returned to his own office and sat down behind his open ledger. Dinah was gone; little Rosie Henderson was only a faded photograph. For the first time he realized that in losing his wife he had lost the only thing he

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had ever really had. For all her acrimonies, her scoldings, Mabel had been a frame for existence. Without the frame was blankness. Perhaps, if he had killed her, there might have been some perverse sense of achievement to support him. But he had only tried to kill her, failed, and lost her anyway.

Mr. Loomis made an effort to reach some communion with the ledger entries which had once been his friends. But even they eluded him and he began gropingly to see that his love of his work at Tinker and Smythe had been inextricably tied to his dread of homegoing. Now that dread was removed and replaced by — nothing.

Mr. Loomis struggled with the ledger. For hours, it seemed, he poured over a single column until the precise little pounds, shillings, and pence danced before his eyes like midges.

It was no good. He closed the book and carried it automatically to the safe. He swung open the door and put the ledger in its appointed place. As he did so, his eyes fell on the poison shelf — on the little green bottle of santonin crystals.

He knew at once what to do. It was as if the next step, which had never figured in his day dreams at all, was something he had rehearsed a thousand times. He took down the bottle, shook crystals into his palm, and replaced the bottle on its shelf. Carefully he closed the safe and went down the passage to the washroom. The crystals dissolved quickly in the paper cup of water. Mr. Loomis raised the cup to his lips and drank.

As he felt the bitter taste in his mouth, a tingle almost of relief passed through him. Perhaps, vaguely, he realized that here at last was an enterprise at which he could not fail.

After he had dropped the empty cup into the waste basket, Mr. Loomis returned to his own office and sat down to wait. He was without feelings now. He had read somewhere that the first symptom of santonin poisoning was a visual illusion in which everything seemed tinged with yellow.

On the wall in front of him was a calendar. He had hardly noticed it before. A charming little thatched cottage nestled on the bank of a millpond. A small boy — or was it a small girl? — sat fishing on the flowery brink of the water. Evening light lulled the whole scene in a placid golden glow. . . .

Mr. Loomis was perfectly aware of the fact that someone had entered the room. He even knew it was Miss Griffin, one of the junior typists, and when she said: "There's a gentleman to see you. Shall I send him in?" he heard her and nodded his assent. Both Miss Griffin and the office were beautiful, bathed in the golden sunset of the calendar.

When Miss Griffin's sparse figure was replaced by that of a large, burly man, Mr. Loomis immediately recognized Al Potts. He didn't wonder why Al should be standing there in his

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office. It only surprised him mildly that Dinah's stepfather-to-be should shine with such a heavenly light.

"Well, Bloomers, hope you don't mind me barging in this way."

Mr. Loomis heard the words distinctly and once again gave his regal nod.

"I wanted to catch you before you got home. There's been a kind of to-do and I've come to ask a favor."

Al was shifting his weight from one large foot to the other — a dancing bear in a world of gold.

"It's this way, Bloomers. Mamie and me broke the news to Dinah today and she's taken it real bad. Been carrying on all afternoon, bawling that she won't go to beastly old Australia, that she won't ever leave her Daddy Bloomers."

Mr. Loomis was light as a piece of paper, floating up, up. But he listened and happiness floated with him.

"Can't do a thing with her," continued Al Potts, "and while she was bawling, Mamie and me got to thinking. To begin with life's going to be pretty rugged; no time, no place really for a kid. So we was wondering, seeing Dinah's so head over heels in love with her Daddy Bloomers, we was wondering if you'd let us leave her with you, say for a year — till we get settled . . .

"If you was to say yes, it would be a real act of friendship," concluded Al Potts, "and it'll make Dinah the happiest little monkey in the world."

The joy was so intense now that it was almost an agony. Everything was gleaming — gleaming gold. Dinah wouldn't leave her Daddy Bloomers. Dinah was going to be his after all. The gold was sand, a vast stretch of golden sand by the summer sea. Dinah was jumping and prancing, her pigtails flying, the gulls curving above her in the gentle golden sky. Look, she had turned! She was running toward him and as she ran, there was another golden child running with her, a solemn little girl clutching a stick of candy rock.

Laughing, sporting, Dinah and Rosie came nearer and nearer. In ecstacy Mr. Loomis stretched out his hands to them.

"Hey, Bloomers," shouted Al Potts, "what's up? What's the matter?"

"Happy." Mr. Loomis' outflung arms sank onto the desk. "So happy . . ."

As his head drooped forward onto his hands, the office clock struck five.

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MacKinlay Kantor chose "The Trail of the Brown Sedan" for inclusion in his fascinating AUTHOR'S CHOICE, *and here is what Mr. Kantor himself wrote about the story:*

"This was one of the last stories I did for Howard Bloomfield of Detective Fiction Weekly, and it was written in July, 1933, while I was working on LONG REMEMBER. *My cops-and-robbers tales sprang out of the old Chicago days. Every young writer who has ever been a newspaper reporter, or who has lived for a time on the fringe of the underworld, can contrive countless stories of this sort. I think 'The Trail of the Brown Sedan' has a kind of sharpness and pungency not always found in pulp magazine material; it is the best of a series of stories which I wrote about the fictitious Glennan brothers."*

We do not mean to take issue with MacKinlay Kantor, but we can't help wondering. Is it really true that every young writer, with the experience and background which Mr. Kantor specifies, can contrive countless stories like "The Trail of the Brown Sedan"? In all honesty, we doubt it. The word "countless" implies mass production, and mass production is admittedly not the safest or surest pathway to quality. True, many of our most prolific writers have often produced gems of the finest cut and clarity, but these were the coalescences of infrequent though inspired moments. Mass production generally means a sloppy and slovenly style, and plots patched together from outworn formulas. And note too the verb which Mr. Kantor instinctively used: "can contrive *countless stories"; if these numberless yarns, so easy to produce, clearly show evidence of having been "contrived," then they will not rise above an inferior grade of "pulp magazine material," and will not achieve future reprint.*

No, the simple truth is that MacKinlay Kantor's best stories, out of his salad days, are at least a little better than he thinks, and that stories which, fifteen years later, are a little better than one thinks are not hacked out by the ream or plucked off an assembly line. It just isn't that easy!

THE TRAIL OF THE BROWN SEDAN

by MacKINLAY KANTOR

THE last recorded words of Sergeant Paul Van Wert, spoken about a minute and a half before he died, were directed at First-class Patrolman Nicholas Glennan, who opened the door for the three detec-

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tives and their manacled prisoner.

"Looks like more Indian summer," said Sergeant Van Wert.

"Another good day," nodded Nick Glennan, and pushed on the bronze cross-bar which served as handle for the narrow panel. When you're convoying a tough guy like Rainy Moper out of a railroad station you don't use the revolving door. No, you use the regular door — Detective Johnson goes ahead, and the tough guy follows along, locked tight to Detective Cohen's wrist. You, Sergeant Van Wert, bring up the rear. You nod to the cop on station duty and say something about the weather. He opens the door for you, and you all go outside and get killed.

Said the *News-Detail*, in its second extra published about an hour and fifteen minutes later: "The three detectives were jubilant, for Rainy Moper, murderer, mail bandit, and extortionist, had fought a hard battle against extradition. Their arrival at the Union Terminal was unheralded. They stepped from the Pullman, brushed through the first crowds of office-bound commuters, and hustled their prisoner out of the station."

Said the *News-Detail*, in its special copyrighted story which went ticking over twenty wires: "Officer Nicholas Glennan, hero of the raid which wiped out the American Packing Company payroll bandits last March, was on station duty. He spoke to his fellow officers and opened the door for them, then started back toward the lower station level."

Said Antonio Bambasino, proprietor of the Union Terminal Smoke Shop: "I was just looking out the window when those men come out with him. They is a blue touring car parked close, with another man he sit at the wheel. One detective he get in front. Those two more start to get in back with the Rainy Moper fellow. Nobody say a word. Then the guns to shoot they start, like this —"

Sister Mary Louis, Superior of St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital, was only twenty feet away, walking toward the station door. Accompanied by Sister Clementina, and having just emerged from a taxicab, Sister Mary Louis was not expecting to see the very quintessence of murder . . . She had level gray eyes, a firm chin, and her calm voice had only a slight tremble in it as she talked to the police.

"I noticed," she declared, "that a brown sedan was parked beside the blue touring car. Just as the group of officers got into the touring car, a man opened the door of the sedan. No, he had no mask. He held something in his hands; it must have been a machine gun. A man was shooting from the front seat, too. We heard the shots . . . we stood there, petrified. Looking at those men. No one screamed. It happened too suddenly. Then the brown car went forward across the low curb, turned past the lamp-post, and raced up the street —"

Taxicab Operator Fred Cepak, license No. 1786, got a good look at the men in the brown car. "There was three. One driving, one in the front

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seat beside him, and one in the back. Two of them was big, fleshy guys, and the one driving was a little dark runt. Naw, they weren't masked or nothing. And well dressed, kind of. The guy in back pulls up with a machine gun, but the fellow in front had an automatic in each hand. The shots go bang, bang, plunk — faster than I can say it — then the little guy says, 'Hell. You got *him!*' And with that they shag-tail outa there. The cops in the touring car are sliding down, dead as anything, all blood and — The sedan door came open, just as the gunmen bounced offa the curb. Then this cop comes out the station door and starts to shoot —"

They were good witnesses, for the most part. Somehow they seemed unusually methodical in telling what they saw. It was as if the blast of gunfire had robbed them of all hysteria. Eight o'clock, on a bright Indian summer morning . . . there in front of the sober railroad station. They were mainly accurate in their statements.

Nick Glennan, with only thirty minutes left before he would be relieved by Officer Canaday, thought he'd see whether he had gained or lost any weight during the hours since he came on duty. He found a penny in his breeches pocket and dropped it into the maw of the slot-machine scales, there in the south corridor of the station.

Then the shooting began . . . He had his gun out, before he reached the street. As he opened the glass panel he could see Detective Johnson's wet, red face sliding lower and lower in the front seat of the police car. That was enough; it told a long story to Nick Glennan in just two-fifths of a second.

The brown sedan swished across the wide parking plaza, its left rear door jolted open, swaying, a wide gray arm reaching out and trying to pull the door shut. Glennan's revolver rang hoarsely, three times. Then, thinking that he had missed, he expended his remaining three bullets in the direction of the gas tank. A huge gray shape tumbled out across the running board of the swaying sedan. Slowly, painfully, it was trying to pull itself back inside as the car swerved around the corner into Comanche Street. Glennan had missed the gas tank, but one of his first three bullets had found a fleshy resting place.

He leaped to the bloody running board of the parked car. People screamed, all around him. Detective Johnson and Sullivan, the driver, had the blank stare of death frozen in their eyes. Out of the red-spattered rear seat came a faint sigh. It was Cohen; he died in the ambulance, five minutes later.

Glennan snapped to the paralyzed taxi driver behind him: "Switch on. Back out! Switch her *on*, I tell you —" He ran to the lamp-post and wrenched open the big green box. He jerked the receiver from its hook and said rapidly: "Glennan on Number Forty-three. Carload of hoods shot up Bureau car just now, at this point. Ambulances, squads, Union Terminal.

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Brown sedan went south on Comanche Street — stop all brown sedans at city limits! Medium-sized car — might be an Olds or Chrysler. I'm on my way —"

A traffic cop was sprinting from the Bailey Street intersection, and another from the east plaza. People screamed, screamed.

Glennan fell into Fred Cepak's green taxicab. "Get going down Comanche," he gasped. Through the open window he howled down to the nearest traffic cop: "Stay on it, Bert!" and the cab went swaying toward the corner, with Officer Nicholas Glennan reloading his gun in the back seat.

He snapped the cylinder home, and climbed out on the running board. In front of the Alcazar Hotel a newsboy was out in the street. "That sedan —" yelled Glennan.

"Went south — south —"

There wasn't much traffic. The cab skidded around the left side of a southbound street car, narrowly missed a northbound car, and screeched down the tracks. There were men lining the curb — a few of them. Somebody pointed, waved. Yes, they must have seen that fat gray shape on the sedan's side, slowly pulling its wounded self back to safety. "Keep the horn going, buddy," said Glennan to Taxicab Operator Fred Cepak.

"Okay."

Looooooo, wailed the horn.

A block away from Paxton Boulevard they could see the traffic cop waving his arms. "Slow!" snapped Glennan. He leaned out and waved an answering hand.

The traffic cop's face was familiar, but to save his life Nick couldn't recall his name.

"Brown sedan? Think it's a Chrysler. She just made a left turn, on the yellow. East on Paxton. What's —"

"They just rubbed out a whole carload from the Bureau," Glennan snarled. "Get over on the box for orders." But he was a hundred yards away as he said the last words, and the cop could only stare after him with puffy eyes.

At the top of the hill by the Episcopal Church, Nick could see the long length of the boulevard sluicing away toward the misty smoke of suburbs. Cars, glistening blotches, the wide band of concrete was dotted with their beetle shapes. Between his dry lips Glennan muttered a curse. This would be the same old story. Lost in traffic. Give any car a minute's start, and the driver had a good chance for a clean getaway. *I had to phone*, he kept hurling at himself, *I had to!* Block the highways — get the news on the radio — stop a brown sedan at the city limits — yes, he had to phone — And that extra minute or two, which brought an ambulance: it might mean life for Van Wert or Cohen. There had been that faint sigh from the shambles of the death car. An extra minute — an ambulance . . . *had to phone.*

"Keep going, bud," he said to the chauffeur.

They raced on. At each of the next

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three corners, Glennan shrieked to pedestrians or grocerymen in front of their shops: "See a brown sedan? Speeding?"

The men gaped at him. Yes, she went that way. No, that was — Did you say a black car? Hey, Pete, wasn't there a car just went speeding past? Yeh, she went north. Right there. Up that street. Yeh. Going like hell —

With Fred Cepak and the green cab Nick Glennan went hurtling up the cross street. North. A car — going like — He overtook it; a small roadster with three high school girls in it.

"Swing her back," he groaned wearily. "It's the same old story, sure as life. The damn sedan's gone . . ."

They came back into Paxton Boulevard. Sirens moving toward them from the east and from the west. Glennan jumped off the running board and held up his hand. A big, black limousine let its brakes crunch; the tires burned in brown ribbons on the concrete. Hard faces, hard eyes staring at him. "Brown Chrysler. Out this way. That's all we know . . . Make for Five Mile Corners, Al." They whistled away; someone was opening the rifle box and dealing out ammunition.

And so it went. There was a cordon around the whole town in less than ten minutes. The telephones jangled and squawled; teletype ribbons took up the story, and state police began to whine up and down the long, open highway on their motorcycles. Brown sedan after brown sedan — farmers, schoolteachers, radio repairmen, dentists, Fuller Brush men — car after car, they were overhauled and lined up, their hands above their heads. What's your name? Where you been? Let's see your license. Keep 'em covered, Jack. Car after car . . .

Detective Abraham Cohen died while the ambulance was still seven blocks away from General Hospital. As for Johnson and Van Wert and the driver, they were past any need for hospitalization. And Mr. Rainy Moper, extortionist and five times a murderer, had gone to his own private brimstone pool with all speed. The women who had fainted were being revived in drug stores beside the station. Newspaper reporters, policemen, gabbling witnesses — a herd of men festered around the blue touring car with its shattered windshield and wet leather cushions.

Nobody was sure what mob had done it. It was hard to believe that any hoodlums, however hopped and demoniac they might be, would cheerfully kill four officers in their eagerness to effect the demise of Rainy Moper.

Nick Glennan got back to the Union Terminal plaza in time to find his brother, Detective Sergeant Dave Glennan, on the job. Fourteen other officers of various kinds were with him.

Before Nick went away to report, he took a walk across the street. He found something lying on the asphalt, near the corner of Comanche Street. It was at this point that the big man

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in the gray suit had sprawled out of the open door when Nick fired. Glennan picked up the object, looked at it dazedly, made as if to throw it away, and then thrust it into his pocket. Slowly he made his way through the packed crowd and into the wide, guarded circle.

"Four of the best guys who ever lived," his dry-eyed brother muttered to him.

Nick Glennan nodded dully. "Yes," he whispered.

They checked up: block by block and man by man. As the brown sedan passed the Alcazar Hotel, the big man who sprawled through the open door had managed to pull himself inside; a man in the front seat had reached back and slammed the door. The cop at Paxton and Comanche was positive in his identification; it must have been the same sedan, he declared — a shiny one with three men in it — which made a left turn into Paxton Boulevard. He blew his whistle at them. If they'd made the turn on the red light, he would have grabbed a car and gone after them, but it was getting on toward the rush hour for city-bound traffic, and any driver is apt to make a mistake and turn on the yellow light instead of the green. Just a split second's difference.

But Paxton Boulevard is mainly a residential street, and in the shuttling stream of cars — in the absence of more cops — the runaway car had vanished. School kids: some said one thing and some said another. You couldn't be sure. It seemed fairly certain that the gunmen had gone north into the new additions between Paxton Boulevard and the railroad; at least they hadn't passed Five Mile Corner.

Eight police cars went cruising through the new prairies, the flat subdivisions. Marble-eyed men examined every alley and driveway and private garage. The human manacles around the main highways were drawn tighter and tighter . . . the teletype clicked and buzzed, phones were a screaming chorus.

First-class Patrolman Nick Glennan came slowly down the steps from police headquarters. "No," he told the clustering reporters, "they've got my story, inside. Go in and talk to the Inspector. You don't want to talk to a damn fool who missed because he was a poor shot."

"Listen, Glennan," said McCail of the *News-Detail* and Luff of the *Tribune*, "nobody's blaming you. You did everything you could —"

Nick shrugged. "That's all right, but I should've got them." He adjusted his peaked cap.

In a gray Packard parked beside the curb were Sergeant Dave Glennan and Detectives Kerry and Horn. "Nick," called Dave.

Nick went over to the car. His corpulent brother was hunched deep in the rear seat with a feather pillow between his shoulders. Dave Glennan's back was still sore, after a famous

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shooting scrape in March. "All washed up?" he asked kindly.

"Yes. I've just been talking to Inspector Bourse."

"You're off duty now?"

Nick blinked at him. "Yes."

"Want to take a ride?"

Promptly enough Nick climbed into the Packard beside his brother. "Let's go," said Dave. They went, swiftly and silently, up the Avenue.

The young patrolman turned his sad eyes to the huge sergeant. "Where you rolling?"

"I've got an *At Will* assignment, but I keep in touch with the Bureau. If they need me they'll shoot it to us on the radio." He shoved the pillow higher between his shoulders. "Did you show the Inspector what you found?"

"Yes. He said it was nothing."

"That's what I say, me boy. Nothing."

Kerry asked: "What did you be finding, Nick?"

The patrolman fished a small object out of his pocket and passed it across to Kerry and Horn. "A bottle opener," grunted Horn.

"Yes, it is that."

It was three or four inches long — a flat oval of silvered metal with a sharp tongue at one side, and a long handle. *HOFFBRAU LIGHT OR DARK. Drink the best* was stamped into the handle.

"You get 'em with a case of Hoffbrau beer," explained Horn. "Whenever you buy a case, they give you a free bottle opener."

Dave Glennan nodded: "That's the trouble; that's the reason it ain't no clue. There's too many of them around."

"Where'd he find it?"

Nick said: "Out on the plaza. It was about where the car was when the big guy slipped out through the door."

"You thought he might have dropped it? . . . Dave, how many cars go by that station in a day."

"One a minute, perhaps. Lots more in rush hours. I don't know; your guess is as good as mine . . . The Inspector said to forget it, eh, Sparrow Cop?"

Nick turned his bitter eyes on him. "I'm a sparrow cop no longer," he said softly. "Though I was on the park police last March, when I grabbed those hoods who shot you — out there on Acola Street."

There was silence in the car for a moment. Dave flushed; awkwardly, he patted his kid brother's knee. "Suppose Inspector Bourse had told you to regard this bottle opener as a clue, Nick. How would you work it?"

Nick took a long breath. "The city flusher," he said, "cleans off that plaza at the Union Terminal every morning. It was there this morning, a bit late — five o'clock, it was. It shoots a powerful stream of water; it would wash that bottle opener up to the curb, like chaff. So the bottle opener was dropped since five o'clock —"

"We're listening," said Dave.

"If a man dropped it from a moving car — or if it got jolted out of the

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side pocket of a moving car — it wouldn't roll far. It ain't the right shape. I picked it up ten feet from the curb, but to the north of the safety island. And the brown sedan crossed there, headed southeast, cutting across the wrong side of the plaza . . . You see? It was in a kind of no-traffic zone. If it fell from any other car it came from one traveling between the stanchion and the curb, because all traffic is supposed to move outside the stanchion."

Kerry said: "And those cars are few and far between. Maybe the big guy did drop it, Nick —"

"Shut up," Dave said. "Would you call up the Hoffbrau Brewing Company by long distance and arrest them all, Nick?"

The radio began to crackle; Nick Glennan didn't answer. The grating voice said: "Squads Eight, Nine, and Sixteen. Suspicious car reported on Pearl Street south of railroad tracks. Abandoned brown sedan. Signal Twenty-four B. Squads Eight, Nine, and —"

"Here's Dorchester Avenue," Dave directed the driver. "Down Dorchester to the Paxton cut-off, then left." The balloon tires howled as the car swung quickly into Dorchester Avenue . . . forty, forty-five, fifty, fifty-five . . . the speedometer ribbon blurred. The siren sang in an endless alto.

Kerry, not the liveliest-witted man in the squad, was mumbling to himself, "Signal Twenty-four B. Signal —"

"You dope," said Horn wearily, "that's 'As you approach the designated point, watch for criminals fleeing from the scene.' "

"As if they hadn't fled from the scene an hour ago," grunted Sergeant Glennan. "I always did say that if you didn't have a license number, you didn't have much to go on."

Nick grinned his tired grin. "When the day comes that they make it jail for the man who drives with muddy license plates, we'll have a better break. There was dirt an inch thick on those plates. Nobody got a smell of them. You can't put teeth in an ordinance that carries a two-dollar penalty."

Vacant lots began to flicker past them.

"Pearl Street," meditated Dave. "That's a block or two past Washington. It's nothing but a big mudhole there — no houses or nothing . . . Turn right at the second corner, Frank."

Horn asked: "And no rise out of anybody at the Gallery?"

"No," said Nick. "We all looked and looked. The taxi driver and the nuns and all of us. It wasn't anybody ever mugged in this town."

"I say they were trying to spring him," grunted Dave.

"And him handcuffed to Cohen?"

"I know the Chief and most of the others think it was a push-off. But it wasn't worth it: if anybody'd wanted to rub out Rainy, they could have managed it easy with stabbing, after he went to the pen. They never

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needed to risk all this. No, they were primed to spring him. Maybe they didn't realize he was tied to Cohen. They got rattled, maybe. Remember what the taxi driver said about it? 'Hell, you got *him!*' That was no push-off."

They shouted and argued back and forth, above the wailing siren. The Packard skidded into the miserable pavement of Pearl Street. No houses here; the wasteland and marshes spread out, block after block. Rubbish piles, tilted signboards . . . Far ahead near the railroad viaduct, a dark group of men milled around a huddle of cars. Dave leaned out and squinted his narrow eyes. "That's Rhineheimer's squad. Eight. They got here ahead of us."

Anna Watelowitz and Irene Krzanowski were the best witnesses who had yet figured in the case. They had been playing games — playing house, mostly — since seven-thirty o'clock in the vacant lot which bordered Pearl Street.

Along about the time they came out to play, said Anna Watelowitz and Irene Krzanowski, they peeked through a brake of dry weeds and saw two cars drive into the narrow lane from the direction of the railroad tracks. One of the cars was brown and one was black.

Two men got out of the black car and joined another man in the brown car. The brown car went away . . . Anna Watelowitz and Irene Krzanowski picked two tomato cans full of burdock burrs. They went over to the lone man who still sat in the black car — he had turned it around until it faced toward the railroad viaduct — and they said, "Hey, mister, buy some fine popcorn, a big bag for a nickel." But the man didn't want to buy any burdock-burr popcorn. He had a snarly white face and he said: "You damn kids," and so they ran away as fast as they could go. They hid in a thicket of marshgrass, where the man couldn't find them.

Finally (it had been quite a long, long time) the brown car came back. It came from the south, and the men jumped out of it hastily and jumped into the black car beside the other man, and went bouncing away toward the railroad tracks . . . An hour passed before Irene and Anna mustered enough courage to approach the abandoned brown sedan. When they climbed up on the running board, they saw blood inside. They ran home, and told, and Mrs. Watelowitz went clear down to the phone at Poppashveli's Handy Grocery, and called the police.

Dave Glennan sat with his feather cushion against his back, jingling a handful of empty .45 caliber shells in his hand. "Yeh, you better do that, Rhineheimer. Take those girls down to headquarters. Maybe they can pick those mugs out. How'd you like a nice fast ride in a great big car, girlies?"

The little radio chanted: "Squad Sixteen, attention. Communicate by

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telephone at once. Squad Sixteen —"

Sergeant Dave Glennan did his communicating from the phone at Poppashveli's grocery. When he rejoined his companions, there was a slight smile on his grim lips.

"Let's go, Frank." He slid into his seat. "They got the St. Louis paper to cooperate and send some pictures over the telephone to the *News-Detail* office. They've got 'em at the Bureau now: pictures of four hoods who trailed around with Rainy Moper in St. Louis and K. C.

Even a telephoto picture means a lot. There wasn't any doubt in the minds of the police and detective forces, half an hour later, that they were looking for Benjamin Farnum, Joe Vitale, and Claude Powers. And according to the two little Polish girls, licking their ice cream cones in the squad room, the fourth photograph was the living image of the man who said, "You damn kids." The fourth photograph was named James Lippert.

"Farnum, Vitale, Powers, and Lippert," chanted Sergeant Dave Glennan as he climbed into the lean Packard. "We're all ready to put the finger on them, except that we don't know where they are."

Kerry swore harshly. "Highway cops! Sure, they'd let the whole army slide through them, if we were after the army —"

"Never mind, Kerry. There's lots of cars on the highway."

"They'll be halfway to Buffalo or El Paso by now."

Glennan looked over at his kid brother, the slim patrolman with the old-young face. Nick was twirling a shiny bottle opener between his fingers.

"That gadget, Nick —"

"Yes?" queried Nick smoothly.

"If you were wearing plainclothes —"

Nick Glennan said: "If I was wearing plainclothes, I'd sure regret that those kids didn't notice the license of the black car. The brown car, we have now learned, was stolen late last night from a roadhouse this side of Midvale, and belongs to a dentist named Holder. But — the black car — those little girls did notice that it had suitcases in it. It's their traveling car, like as not. And when men who like beer go a-traveling, where do they buy their beer?"

"In grocery stores at home, before they start out."

"Not if they're in a hurry. No, indeed. It's only after they reach their destination, mind you, that they feel free to indulge in a bit of a drink. At road-stalls. At hot-dog stands. That's where they would be buying it."

Everybody grunted.

"I'm cock-eyed, and I never expected to be taking suggestions from a steer in harness," muttered Dave Glennan, "but we might take a drive in the country. It's a fine Indian summer day, as poor Van Wert remarked before those gorillas got him . . .

"Highway Twenty-six is the short line from St. Louis and Midvale. Let's mosey out to the city limits and

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invest in a hot-dog and a glass of beer."

Three out of the first nine road-stalls were all that sold Hoffbrau beer, and none of those three road-stalls had sold a twelve-bottle case in weeks and weeks. No, they didn't remember any four guys in a black car. Yes, it seemed like those guys might have been here . . . No. No spikka Engliss. Sella nice hamburg —

"As a plainclothes officer, Nicholas," said Dave Glennan to his brother, "you're a stiff pain in the —"

"Don't say it," whispered Nick. "You insult me, and I'll be forgetting that you still got a hunk of lead alongside your chiropractor's delight! And here's another hot-dog stand, gas station, or whatever you call it."

It was a rambling one-story shack at the intersection of Routes Twenty-six and Fifty-five. There were four gas pumps in front and two water-closets in back. The owner was named Basilio Constanopolus, and yes, he carried Hoffbrau beer. Light or dark. How many bot' you want?

"Not one!" snarled Dave Glennan, and exhibited his badge.

"Listen, police," wept Mr. Constanopolus, "I ain't never sold a bootleg since we got a good beer. What the hell? No, police —"

"Talk to him, Nick," ordered the sergeant.

Patrolman Glennan smiled his sweetest smile. "Now, Mr. Constanopolus, you think hard and try to help us. Did you sell a case of Hoffbrau during the night?"

"There was those man —" Basilio wrinkled his forehead.

"Maybe they drove in with two cars?"

"They have hamburg egg sandwich. Yes, it was so. And they buy a twelve-bot' case."

Nick twirled the opener in his hand. Mr. Constanopolus let his eyes become narrow and somber. "Those are free, for no money. They come in a case."

"They came in two sedans? Four men?"

The Greek shrugged. "Maybe four. It was pretty late they come. They eat somethings; then they go away with beer."

"Now," crooned Nick, "you didn't by any chance be noticing their license plates?"

Mr. Constanopolus said: "Not the one car. I see the license on the one under the light, beside the pump."

Five pairs of hard eyes were on his face. "Yes?" drawled Dave Glennan.

"Not the number. I see the name of what state. All day I count how many state come to stop here. Some day maybe I see twenty-five. Utah, I see — Col'rado, New Yawk — all those place I see on the cars."

"What was this one, buddy? What state?"

"Jefferson," said the Greek.

Nobody spoke for a moment. "Jefferson?" asked Nick slowly.

Mr. Constanopolus shrugged again. "I see," he said.

"But, listen, friend, there isn't any such state."

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"On the car. It is a black car, I remember now."

"What color was the license plate?"

"I don't know. It was Jefferson. I read. I have a kids what go to school. He tell me about once there was a great man here in this country, it is Jefferson. So, maybe he have a state name' for him, uh?"

Kerry sobbed: "Hell. Lay off, Nick. I got it."

"What?"

"He must have got it mixed up with Washington. It was a Washington State license."

Obstinately, Constanopolus shook his head. "I not get the number, see, for why the hell I remember numbers? Just the name, Jefferson. I spell it, uh? Chay-ee-eff-eff-ee —"

"Aw," growled the sergeant. He opened the car door. "Come on, Nick. Get going. Maybe it was Washington, maybe not. He don't know what it's all about."

"Jefferson!" Basilio Constanopolus howled after them, as the Packard crunched over the gravel and turned back toward the city again.

First-class Patrolman Glennan tried to go home and rest, but it was no go. Ordinarily he would have been sound asleep long before this hour. The hands of the little electric clock in his kitchenette crawled past noon, and he merely played with the scallops which Alice had baked for him. Finally he put on his blouse and belt and cap, snatched a kiss from the prettiest face this side of County Cork, and went down to headquarters.

"Beautiful man," he said to the mutt-faced Sergeant Beasley, "we did have a colored chart that showed all the auto license plates in the United States. What went with it?"

"You'll find it tacked beside the Museum in the other room," said Beasley, "and you ain't so good-looking yourself, punk. I may be within seven months of my pension, but I bet I could still plug a gas tank in a car if I had a full gun to do it with."

Nick's ears were purple. For want of any retort he went into the next room and looked at the chart of auto license plates. He leaned upon a cabinet full of rusty revolvers and dusty blackjacks and perforated stars, and studied the little colored oblongs . . . Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin . . . Most certainly there was no State of Jefferson in the United States.

Suddenly he bent closer to the chart. His ears grew pale and purple once more. From the outer room Sergeant Beasley watched him, sniffing.

Glennan came out. His eyes were very bright, and a slight flush still clung around the roots of his hair.

"Get me the Bureau, will you?" he asked of the man at the switchboard.

"Guests will use the house phones around the corner," mocked the switchboard.

Nick glared. He went around the corner to the single instrument in its dim nook.

"Is Dave Glennan out with his squad?"

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The dim voice of the Bureau said: "No. He's in with the Lieutenant. Who's calling?"

"This is Officer Glennan, his brother. Can I talk —"

"Sure. I'll get him for yuh."

Connections buzzed and stuttered . . . Dave's voice. "Yeh."

Nick said: "Tell me this, Dave. Do they still think those guys left town?"

"Left town? Say, what do —"

"With airplanes and state troopers and all, tailing them all over hell. What do you think?"

Dave gulped once or twice. "Why — what makes you think they'd lie around here? Sure, it's been done before, but —"

"At night they could make it. We know they went north under that railroad viaduct from the prairies, and there's two good streets, not much traveled, leading back to town. Take a small hotel — an outlying one, you see. With garages near by, and —"

"For God's sake," yapped Sergeant Glennan, "have you gone nuts, or what?"

"I'll be coming to the Bureau as fast as a cab can get me there," snarled the ex-sparrow cop, "and you be going in with me to talk to Inspector Bourse. I'm going to tell you upholstered cushion-bellies what kind of a car to look for!"

It was at the end of the fifth-floor-west-corridor of the Hotel De Soto. Two adjoining rooms, 524 and 526. The occupants were listed as the Hot-Cha Orchestra from Louisville. Their names were Morgan, Fry, Adams, and Johnson . . .

"The nerve, the brazen nerve of them!" gritted Inspector Bourse. "Using the name of a man they just killed —"

He stood beside a bed in room 508, with a throng of officers blocking the open door beyond. The operator connected him with room 524, and a coarse voice yelped nervously at him.

"This is Inspector Bourse," said the old man with the gold badge. "I want to tell you sniveling hyenas that you're washed up. No, hold on — I'll do the talking! Every room around you — on all sides, above and below — has been vacated. There are officers at the top and bottom of the fire escapes, and in opposite windows commanding your rooms. We've got machine guns trained on your doors, and tear gas all ready to let go. You can come out, with your hands up, or you can stay there and take it!"

There was a long, heart-breaking silence. Then the rasping voice began to stammer —

"Break?" echoed the old Inspector. "Yeh, you gave our men a break this morning. Pie-eyed, hopped-up bums: you chopped the whole carload down! Only one of you got a shot in the arm for his pains. Auto accident, you told the chambermaid when she saw the bloody bandages! Remember this: you can only get life in this state — so think it over, and think fast —"

Down the hall there was the sudden *blam* of an automatic. Old Bourse dropped the phone upon the bed.

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"So that's the answer, eh?" he whooped. "Let 'em have it, boys! The taxpayers'll foot the bill for damage—"

Five machine guns began to pound.

They carried them away in four neat, body-length baskets of brown wicker. Two officers had been wounded, neither seriously. Up in his temporary headquarters in room 508, old Inspector Bourse patted Nick Glennan's arm as that embarrassed young man slid his gun into its holster.

"Smoke up!" he said to the Glennan boys. "Here — twenty-five centers, and niver say the old man is a tightwad. Boys, I knew your grandfather — I was just a little kid when he got killed in the anarchists' riot, but I do remember him — and I want to say that the old fellow must be very, very proud of you tonight."

"I didn't do a damn thing, Inspector," growled Dave. "It was all the doings of my kid brother."

"And him still with a stiff arm and unsteady shoulder from that affray last March," nodded the Inspector. "It's quite like a Glennan not to whine around and alibi because he wasn't shooting so good, and all of a sudden. Well, Nick — and I hope to see you a sergeant like your brother before you're many months older — I must say that your deduction on those license plates was a slick piece of work. It was aisy enough for us to run the car down, once you gave us the tip. The boys got it in the thirteenth garage they went to, and the rest was aisy, too."

Nick's ears were red again. "I just played a hunch, sir, about them not having run out of town."

"But what good would the hunch have done if you hadn't lined up the car? Sure, it isn't every cop could spot a car on the evidence you had and lead us right to the killers."

First-class Patrolman Glennan wriggled, but his weary face was grinning. "The Greek had a word for it, sir! Jefferson, he said, and of course we thought he was crazy. But I went down to headquarters and had a look at the chart of license plates. Just by chance I noticed that Kentucky — you see how it was, Inspector. The Kentucky license was number 345-328 — a hot car, no doubt — but it had the letters K-Y, very small in one corner, and the number 33 very small in the other. And all the way across the bottom was the name of the *county:* Jefferson. It's an odd way they must have in Kentucky, putting the names of their counties on the license plates."

"From Kentucky," said Sergeant Dave Glennan, "come fast horses and beautiful women. From the Glennan family comes cops. If you wouldn't object, Inspector, I'd like to offer us all a little drink — just for luck. I'm mighty proud of my ugly relative, and —"

Inspector Bourse thrust out his jaw. "Of course I object, Sergeant! It's contrary to law and regulations and the best traditions of our department . . . Ring immediately for ice and ginger ale!"

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WINNER OF A FOURTH PRIZE: JOHN DI SILVESTRO

We can't tell you everything the author of "The Big Shots" wrote to us; we wish we could; it would help every would-be writer to persevere, to hang on, to keep the light of hope burning; it would help every reader, casual or serious, to understand better the problems of the young writer, and through that understanding, appreciate more tolerantly the near-misses as well as the hits; it would help every literary critic and every literary agent to remember what John Di Silvestro, who was only 20 years old when he wrote "The Big Shots," has yet to learn — that money, and what money stands for, is not everything an intelligent person can want. Yes, John, there are things more precious than money; talent is one of them, and to compromise talent for money is too big a price for anyone to pay . . .

John Di Silvestro wrote "The Big Shots" back in 1945. It poured out of his typewriter like blood spurting out of a slashed jugular. He showed the manuscript to a Chicago editor who "said nice things about it" — but couldn't buy it. So 20-year-old John threw the story into a dark place.

Two years later John sent the manuscript to a New York editor. This time it was returned without comment, without encouragement.

The next year John gave the story another whirl on the wheel of misfortune. He sent it to a literary agent who promptly rejected it as "not being magazine stuff."

Then another agent read "The Big Shots" and turned thumbs down — it "wouldn't go for magazines," he said.

Last year John mailed the manuscript to EQMM. His accompanying letter told more between the lines than perhaps John realized — the slow heartbreak of despair. We read the story and were immensely impressed. We simply could not understand how it had failed to excite at least one editor or literary agent sufficiently to be thrust into print.

We rushed a special delivery letter to the author, praising the story, making an offer to purchase it, and suggesting that the story be officially submitted to our annual contest. John agreed, and we cannot resist quoting from his letter: "Ellery Queen wrote me a special delivery. I was staring at wet trees when the postman's car slid to the curb. I watched him. He got out. I heard him at the box. I ran down the stairs.

" 'Mr. Di Silvestro?'

" 'Yes.'

"I tore the envelope to shreds. I readandreadandread, then I put some paper into the typewriter. I tried to be casual. I tried to be honest. I tried

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to make Mr. Queen understand that his letter was the brightest, purest, finest thing that ever happened to the one called John, by some."

In a later note John wrote us: "I know you'll play down the slum angle. I reck the truth of the matter is that your first letter hit me at a time when I would have done anything — maybe even be honest."

And now, completing the circle, we are back to our original theme: John, there are things more precious than the golden apples paid to compromisers. This above all, be honest. Be honest until the cows come home; be honest until hell freezes over; be honest to the end of time, to the crack of doom, to the "last syllable of recorded" manuscript. And never make any excuses for being honest. And don't worry that you've "yet to leave the slums." You'll leave the slums, and help eliminate the slums — by being honest. "The Big Shots" is honest, and its honesty is a slashing condemnation of the slum conditions which breed juvenile delinquency. That is why we are so proud to publish it . . .

THE BIG SHOTS

by JOHN DI SILVESTRO

Fat Tony Ovaki's face was an unhealthful pallor, his dirty blond hair a mass of greasy ringlets shading a meaty nose that was speckled with blackheads; his squat body was crouched forward as if futilely trying to escape the sloven clothing.

He joined slender Pete Semo on the corner of the street that was cool and breezy in the early morning sunshine. The tall rooming houses on either side of the street were solid brick buildings with blunt, unpainted, disreputable fronts of seamed and cracked bricking, ever ready to spawn another generation of slumjohns.

"What's the matter, Fat?" asked Pete when he got within talking distance. "You look scared."

"Nothin'," said Tony Ovaki.

"Somebody picking on you?"

"Naw, nobody's acting smart." Tony told him.

"For a guy with your built you're plenty yellow," sneered Pete. "You look sick. Come on, tell me. You're in my gang."

"Just trouble at home," said Tony.

"Old lady want you to go to work, huh?" laughed Pete. "I thought you gave her the twenty bucks you had."

"I did," snapped Tony, his dirty face weak with rage. "She pulled me outta bed, that dirty —"

"Shut up. You're the only guy I know that goes around cursing his own old lady."

"She's a —"

"I told you to shut up. I don't like that kinda talk."

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Tony slowly met Pete's eyes. "You angling for anything, Pete?"

Pete gurgled his abrupt little laugh. "You even act tough today, Fat." He brought out a crumbled pack of cigarettes, stuck one between his lips.

Tony looked at the two cigarettes left in the pack. "You got an extra, Pete?"

Pete put the pack back into his shirt pocket. "Go an' call Tommy and Roachy."

"Okay, Pete, but save me the butt."

"You heard me, didn't ya?"

Tony slowly turned away; for two seconds Pete fooled with the match folder. He lighted the cigarette.

The early morning sunshine spanked against this side of the street; he crossed, walking into the shade of the North side of the street.

Pete forced his eyes away from the littered curb, grimaced savagely; some day he was going to get outta this neighborhood, have an apartment out on the drive with glamor dames around and plenty of good liquor.

He sucked wistfully on the cigarette, the smoke panging against his lungs. He exhaled quickly; he was a little dizzy.

He thought of food for a while. Breakfasts just like in the movies — those round glass dishes with big grapefruits in them. He had tasted grapefruit once; he wondered why the rich guys always ate them in the movies.

He dipped his hand into his right hip pocket and brought out the nickel and three pennies. He walked up the street, forcing his legs to wide quick strides, his wide thin shoulders swinging aggressively.

The cigarette burned his fingers but he managed to choke down one last swallow from it and flipped it into the gutter and walked into the smells of cheeses and greens of Tompo's grocery store.

"Longjohn," said Pete.

"Three for eight cents," grumbled Tompo.

"Just want one."

Tompo wiped his hand on his green sweater and waved the flies away from the wooden tray and picked up a twisted longjohn.

"Gimme one with some sugar on it," said Pete.

"What the hell you want for three cents?" Tompo said sharply, handing over the roll.

Pete bit deeply into the greasy roll, pocketing the two cents change from the nickel. He now had some change to rattle.

He walked out into the crisp morning coolness. The stench of kerosene assailed his nostrils. He breathed deeply and again bit into the roll, thoughtfully holding it away from his nose as he chewed the slightly cooked dough. He wished he had some place to go, maybe some girl who wore tennis shorts and had a tennis racket under her arm. Boy, that would be class. Would the rest of his gang get hot . . .

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"Hey, Pete." Tony's voice neatly penetrated his dreamy mood. He quickly gulped down the remainder of the roll, wiping away the flakes of sugar from his chin with his palm.

"Hi," chorused Roachy and Tommy.

"You got a cig?" asked Roachy, grimacing like Bogart.

"I got a nickel," said Pete. "Let's chip in and get a pack."

"I'm broke," said Tony..

"Didn't ask you, Fat," said Pete, pushing out his palm and driving Tony against tall, skinny Tommy.

Roachy laughed, running his thin fingers through his bushy, black curly hair. "What we gonna do, Pete?"

"Feel like goin' horse-back riding," said Pete. "But where can we get four bucks?"

"Jeez, do they charge half a buck an hour?" asked Tommy.

Pete nodded, hitching his belt around the leanness of his waist.

"Have they got black and white horses?" said Tommy. "Them are called pintos, that's what they call them little horses."

"I had a big one last time," said Pete. "I didn't call it no pinto."

"Let's go to the warehouse," said Tony. "They need help there, they pay half a buck an hour. I know."

Pete looked at the aproned, loose haired women shuffling onto the front stoops to get some early morning sunshine. He spat into the gutter. "Yeah, let's go earn ourselves some dough."

They walked to the huge towering Wong warehouse that bordered the slit of the Chicago river, the waterway being diverted to make passage for the Great Lakes boats to land their materials at the warehouse loading platforms.

"We see a guy called Rock," said Tony. "He does the hiring."

They walked through the shadowy alleys formed by the piled crates and oil cans leading to the employment shack.

"Yeah?" said Rock, turning from the small scarred desk that was papered profusely with bills of lading and routing sheets. His bare arms came up sharply, then thudded against the arm-rests of the swivel chair.

"We wanta put in a little time," said Pete. "Tony here" — he pointed to the big figure of Ovaki — "said you hired him before."

"I know," Rock said. "You guys kin work, but you better not let me catch you smoking."

"We ain't got no cigarettes," said Roachy.

"Okay," wheezed Rock, slowly getting to his feet. "C'mon, I'll show you where you work."

They followed him to the high platform adjacent to the swirling dirty water.

"You guys just take the crates that that boat will have on board," said Rock, pointing to a squat steamer pulling in toward the pier. "Got it?"

"Yeah," said Pete, matching Rock's ugly grin.

"You see that they do a good job," Rock said to Pete.

Pete spat into the water. "Sure, Rock."

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As Rock got out of hearing distance Roachy cursed sullenly. "You lucky baba," he told Pete.

"I'm sorta foreman," grinned Pete, "and you guys are gonna work."

"Who the hell feels like riding a horse?" said Tony.

"I do," snapped Pete, "and if you don't work, Fat, I'll throw you in the river."

They laughed for a while, then the squat river boat battered against the pier and two husky seamen were tying her secure.

"Go on," ordered Pete, "jump on the boat, and start bringing those crates up here." He watched them jump aboard. He vaguely wished he could join them. It must feel nice being on a ship, being so close to land with nothing to worry about.

Pete pushed the crates farther back onto the pier as Roachy, Tony, and Tommy dumped them on the edge of the platform.

Two hours later they struggled onto the pier.

"We put in a buck's worth," groaned Tony, "let's go get our dough."

"We need car fare to get to the stables," said Pete. "C'mon let's work a little more. Then we can even buy something to eat."

"Sure, you ain't doin' nothing," growled Roachy, knuckling the sweat from his eyes.

Pete brought up his clenched fist, smashed it into Roachy's shoulder.

Roachy's head bobbed down and he charged Pete, swinging his left with all his strength. Pete easily dodged it, grabbing Roachy's left arm and sticking out his right foot. As Roachy lurched past him, he smashed a pile-driving fist into his stomach.

Roachy thrashed on the splintery dock.

They watched him choke, a trickle of vomit slipping past his lips. He didn't have any breakfast to splurge on the pier. He rolled from Pete's foot, got to his knees, and weakly tackled Pete as he closed in. They rolled and thudded against the planking.

Finally Pete had his knees on Roachy's arms, his feet effectively keeping Roachy prostrate.

"If you really wanta get hurt, Roach, just make a move."

Roachy's head twisted miserably. "Okay, I had enough."

Pete got up and before he could straighten up, the dock crashed against his face. He twisted over on his back. Rock reached down and dragged him to his feet.

"You shouldn't've been fighting, sonny," said Rock. "Now get to work."

Pete shook his head numbly; he reached up for it, tried to screw it on. A sudden flash blinded his vision and he fell against Rock's chest. He reeled back rather than lean against him. Tony and Tommy caught him.

Pete shook off the protecting hands of his friends. "You hit me when I wasn't looking," snarled Pete, moving toward Rock.

Rock easily held him off. "If you

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want another smack, kid, just keep on acting smart."

Pete lashed out with his foot, it completed a shallow arc against Rock's thick shinbone. He yelped and hopped backward. Pete's foot came up again, this time against Rock's unprotected stomach. Rock went over backward.

The crew aboard the boat yelled and moved toward the platform.

Tony and Tommy picked up the small but heavy crates, and heaved them against the oncoming crewmen. They cursed and jumped back onto the deck of the craft.

Pete grabbed Roachy's arm. "C'mon, let's get outta here," he yelled, helping the unsteady Roach to find his stride.

They reached the comparative safety of high tiers of crates, then they raced through the street, weaving through the tangle of traffic before the street side of the warehouse.

Their breaths were hot and hard against each other's cheeks as they paused in the alleyway to catch their breaths.

"Dirty sklink," Pete said thickly, "we didn't even get paid."

"Do you think he knows where we live?" gasped Roachy.

"He knows where I live," Tony said tonelessly. "I worked a week there. He even got my social security number."

"You lousy fat stink," shrieked Pete. "You—"

"Aw cut it," said Roachy. "It isn't his fault. We gotta think of something."

"You kicked him," cried Tony. "I ain't worried."

Pete moved toward Tony but Roachy weakly held him off. "That'll make it worse. We gotta stick together."

Pete quickly regained his composure. "Sure." He was the boss, couldn't let a big slob scare him. He'd showed them.

"Look," said Pete, sticking his finger into Tony's sloping stomach. "You go home, hide in the hallways, tell your old lady to tell whoever comes asking for you that you left town. If nobody comes, okay. I just wanta know if that guy Rock's going to do something."

"Yeah, that's smart," said Tommy, flexing his arms and straightening his dirty polo shirt.

"Okay, get on home," ordered Pete, "and run. He might've gone to your house already."

Tony's face slackened. "Yeah? What if he did already? I ain't going."

"You ain't yellow?" said Pete. "Or are you?"

"Yeah," said Roachy. "Are you yella?"

"Okay," said Tony. "I'll go home. If he does come around asking for me what do *we* do?"

"We'll protect you," said Pete. "Now get."

They watched him walk away.

Roachy smiled ruefully. "He's the guy who knows our names. Rock only knows where *he* lives."

"I know," said Pete.

Tommy cursed. "He'll talk if Rock

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gets ahold of him, you can bet on it."

"We gotta take that chance," said Pete.

Tony ducked into the alleyway, darting swiftly through the vast parking space of the Cab Company, and had to pause for breath when he hit South Halstead Street.

His hands shook miserably as he cleared the sweat from his eyes. He wished he had a cigarette.

He cursed shrilly. Only two more blocks now. He carefully walked into another alley, automatically flattening his back against the wall of a building. The chipped bricking of the wall bit into his spine but he didn't notice. He panted but he knew he wasn't that tired. He remembered a George Raft picture, but it seemed sorta silly now. He didn't even have the girl Raft had had to fight for; he was just acting scared.

He counted slowly up to ten, glanced up the mouth of the alley; no danger from that quarter. He walked deeper into the smells and débris of the alleys that sliced up the neighborhoods just a ten minute trolley ride from the Loop.

He looked up at the back porch of the tall, narrow building. His mother was hanging shirts and pillow-cases on the clothes-line. It cringed every time she yanked the rope outward to place more clothing on the line.

He carefully unhooked the bar of the door and went into the yard. He quickly went up the stairs.

"Ma."

She sighed deeply, viciously yanking the cord.

"Ma . . . you gotta listen."

She rummaged for some clothespins in the deep pocket of her dirty apron.

"Did anybody come lookin' for me, Ma?"

She jerked around. "What did you steal?"

"Nothin', Ma, honest. Just some big guy's looking for me. He's gonna beat me up."

Her thick neck reddened angrily. "What did ya rob?" she repeated doggedly.

"Honest to God I didn't pick up anything, Ma. I'll tell you: I went to the warehouse to put in a little time like you told me this morning."

"Then why ain't you working?" she thumped, rubbing the rust from her hand against her thigh.

"I'm trying to tell you," he screeched. "Listen, Ma: Rock, the foreman at the warehouse took me and the guys on to work. Then this guy Rock slugs Pete for nothin' at all. We guys just knocked around the other guys who try to pile on us. Then we ran away."

"What you worried about? You're in the right."

"Yeah . . . but this guy Rock is tough."

"It wasn't your fault," she repeated. "Anyhow, that kid Pete had it coming to him; he's a troublemaker."

"Ma, will you listen," he snarled. "Rock doesn't know Pete's last name

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or address. He only knows my name and address. Jeez, why did I have to go to work there?"

"What the hell you want me to do?"

"Listen: when somebody comes askin' for me you just tell 'em I went to the country, you don't know where."

She sighed, her meaty shoulders rising and falling with the motion; her hand went to the back of her dress. At length she said, "Okay, I'll tell that. You really going outta town?"

"Naw, I'll be in the hallway."

She laughed. "You nuts? Why don't you go outta town? You'll learn what it means to be on your own."

"Oh, Ma. Honest, when this blows over I'll get a steady job and really work."

"Okay, but don't hang around the hall." She stared at the reddish streak of rust on her apron. "Somebody'll see you skulkin' 'round and really get suspicious."

"Thanks, Ma."

"What did ya steal?"

"Dammit, I told you I didn't steal anything!"

"Better be right orest I'll kick you out. Do you understand?"

"Yeah, and leave the kitchen window open. I'll sneak in late tonight. So don't get sore."

She reached into the wicker basket and brought up a pair of tattered shorts, carefully pinning them to the clothes-line, jerking it forward with another whine of the rusty pulley.

"Ma?"

"Yeah."

"Could you loan me twenty cents? I'm dying for a smoke."

"There's some beer bottles, go get the deposits."

"I can't be seen on the street."

"Then get the hell outta here."

"Please, Ma. I mean it, I'll get a job, just give me twenty cents."

"Ain't got it."

"C'mon, Ma."

She picked up the empty basket and grunted as she stepped over the high wooden plank leading into the kitchen. For a minute she stood stock-still, her elbow working furiously. He looked at the swaying mass of clothes on the line.

"Go buy some beer an' I'll give you the money," she said, flattening her hand against her bulky hip.

"You bum," he choked out, and charged out the kitchen door.

He made his way through the alleys. He walked slowly, carefully, sort of storing up his energy if flight became imperative. He wasn't shaky any more. Hell, if it wasn't for him picking up those crates and heavin' 'em at the guys on the boat, Pete woulda got killed sure.

He ran across Meriden Street, squeezed between the bent bars that encircled the large YMCA baseball diamond, and trotted behind the park benches, his feet dully padding against the loose gravel.

He paused at the water fountain which stood at the path leading onto Sholwa Street, drank deeply, the

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water splashing against his bare throat.

He gulped the air noisily, quickly twisting around. Not a person in sight.

He walked slowly up Sholwa Street, waited for the light to switch to green, dashed across the avenue, and again eased his gait. He glanced behind: no one was tailing him.

He walked very slowly past the Church, made certain that no one was in sight, and quickly ran up the stairs and entered the gloom of the House of Worship.

He dipped his finger in the Holy Water font, hurriedly made the sign of the cross. He peered deeply into the darkness of the Church.

"*Pssst.*"

He jerked erect.

"Over here, Tony."

He followed the damp echo, gently making his way to the extreme right where a row of pews were set.

A sickly smile spread over Tony's face as he nodded to Tommy and Roachy, who were sitting on the kneeling board below the benches. Pete Semo was sprawled on the bench.

"What did your old lady say?" husked Pete.

"She'll tell 'em I went to the country if anybody comes nosing around."

"Why didn't you stay in the hallway like I said?" croaked Pete, hopelessly trying to curb his tone to the cooly elegant quiet of the Church.

"That wouldn't be smart," said Tony. "Somebody'd see me sneaking around and get suspicious."

"Yeah, that's right," muttered Pete.

The quick precise clicking of heels stopped at their pew. They quickly turned. Father Littono regarded them suspiciously. "The Church is no place for gossip, boys."

Pete gazed at the sleek blackness of Father Littono's street suit, the glistening white collar about his throat being the immature halo that someday he would lay permanent claim to.

"We just thought we'd give a little prayer," Pete said a bit quicker than he'd intended. "We got a ball game tonight."

"Very fine thought," said the priest. "Let me know how you make out. I'll remember your intention, boys."

"Gee, thanks," Pete said, hastily making for the entrance, his gang behind him.

"Say, boys," called Father Littono.

They turned.

"You can tell me how you made out this Sunday — at nine o'clock Mass."

"Sure thing, Father," yelled Pete, and they ducked out before the echo thundered back at them.

They walked away from the Church, heading toward the Loop.

"Damn you," barked Pete, after the two required blocks from the Church had been covered.

"I didn't do nothin'," Tony yelped.

"We coulda stood there longer if you didn't haveta come. It's cool in the Church."

"I told you I couldn't stay around the house."

"Okay — okay."

"Hey? You know something?"

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said Roachy. "Us being in Church and all I just remembered." He waited for their "yeahs."

"You know old man Stoki who owns the Gaytime Theater?"

"What about him?" said Tommy.

"He owns the burlesque joint on Water Street too."

"I knew that," said Pete.

"Yeah," droned Roachy. "But he's an usher in Church on Sundays."

"How do you know?" sneered Tony.

"I was in Church once," Roachy said, staring hard at Tony.

"Okay, so you were in Church," grunted Pete.

"Don't you get it?" Roach said excitedly. "That's an angle, we could —"

"Blackmail him," finished Pete. He thoughtfully slitted his eyes as he'd seen movie badmen do at sinister moments. Something *could* be done with this.

"Here's what we do," commanded Pete. "You, Roachy, since you thought of it can go and brace him."

"Hell, no, he'll call a cop."

"On the 'phone, dummy, on the 'phone," snapped Pete.

"That's different," mumbled Roachy.

"You just tell him," continued Pete, "that if he don't leave fifty bucks — no, make it a hunnerd — with the guy who'll be near the fire exit near the alley tomorrow night, Father Littono will find out about his owning the cheap feeler."

Roachy shook his head negatively his bright eyes eagerly seeking a similar attitude from his friends. "I ain't got a nickel to phone with," he said weakly.

"Jeez, are you yellow too?" growled Pete.

"I just ain't got a nickel."

Pete brought out his five pennies, handed them over. He pointed to a drug store half a block up the street. "We'll be walking down the street. You catch up with us."

They watched him hurry up the street.

Pete brought out his cigarette pack.

"I'll light it for you," offered Tony.

Pete broke the cigarette in half, giving pieces to Tommy and Tony. He lighted the remaining whole one. The smoke was a hot burst against his lungs.

Then Roachy joined them.

"What did he say?" asked Tony.

"Almost nothing."

"About the money, the money?" growled Pete.

"He laughed at me."

"What did he say?"

"I told him to have it or else."

"Or else what?" snapped Pete.

"Or else I'd tell the priest."

Pete's face slowly turned skyward. "What did he say to that, Roachy?"

"He said he didn't want to go to Church any more anyway."

They regarded Pete silently for a full minute, then exploded into bursts of ragged laughter.

"What's so funny?" growled Roachy.

"I'm going home and listen to the ball game," choked Pete, trying to

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catch his breath. "What the hell . . . we ain't got any money and Rock doesn't know where to find us."

"Yeah," said Roachy, his lower lip savagely protruding. "But Fat Ovaki here can get nailed."

Pete sobered. "Remember, Tony, no matter what time it is, if anybody comes looking for you, you let me know." His lips relaxed with a smile. "Maybe Rock won't come looking for you himself, see?"

"Yeah, yeah," said Tony. "Okay, I get in touch with you if anything happens. Where will you guys be?"

"We're all going home," Pete said wearily.

"Yeah," echoed Tommy and Roachy.

Tony raked them with hot, black eyes. "What if he does come looking for me. What do we do then? That's what I'm worried about."

"We take care of him," said Pete.

"Okay." Tony walked away. He turned once but they were walking off into different directions. He wondered if he could buy cigarettes in jail. He wished he'd went and bought the beer for his old lady . . .

The blistering rays of the sun twined through the railing of the back stairway as he made his way up to the flat.

His mother was drinking a cup of coffee. "He was here," she said.

Somehow tears managed to trickle down his quivering cheeks. He blew his nose. "What did he want, Ma?"

"Said he had something personal to tell you." She noisily gulped down some of the coffee. "He caught me guzzling beer. The fruit, he wouldn't even have a drink with me. I told him you went out to the country."

"Yeah, yeah. But what did he say?"

"That he had something personal to tell you."

Tony ran his fingers over his fuzzy cheeks; the bones felt weak. He furiously tucked his shirt into the band of his dirty pants. "Is he coming back?"

"Said he'd try and locate you."

"God." The sweat swept to the base of his tightened jawline. "Was he a big guy, Ma?"

"Ya little runt, what did you steal?"

"I told you, I didn't steal anything."

"Then don't try and trip me up by saying the guy was big."

"Jeez, he sent one of his friends. Ma — Ma I gotta get outta town, gimme a couple of bucks."

"Ain't got it," she said promptly.

"But, Ma —"

"Get outta here. If you're scared, what you want me to do?"

"But, Ma —"

"Nuts." She picked up the coffee cup, dashed the contents into the sink, washed the cup with cold water, took the quart bottle of beer from the window ledge and slowly filled the cup.

He dashed out, went down the stairs, and ran through the alleyway; the sun didn't reach the alley. The narrow confines of the back pathway

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lead to any destination — if you knew the right short-cuts.

He walked into a backyard, looked about carefully. Two dirty tots played in the adjoining yard, clothes fluttered from lines about him. He moved under the protection of the porch's shading, reached between the bars, and knocked against the window pane of the basement flat.

Pete peered out. "Come on in, my old man's working."

Tony entered. "Some guy came looking for me, Pete."

"Was it Rock?"

"No, my old lady said he wasn't a big guy."

Pete went to the radio and screwed it into silence. "Did your old lady keep quiet about you?"

"Yeah, she said I went to the country like I told her."

Pete glared at his dirty fingernails. "Go to Greenbow Street, you know, where all the factories are at. There's an old trailer there, the one we used as a clubhouse before. Go inside, I'll get Tommy and Roachy."

"Don't be long," Tony said, quickly darting out.

Pete went out of the front entrance, walking swiftly, yet with an easy loose movement. He glanced in store windows to check his strides. He grinned; he was glad that he'd read that book telling about how tough adventurers walked — with quick, easy, effortless strides.

He moved up the stairway of a sturdy red brick building. "Oh Tommy," he called.

Tommy materialized quickly in the doorway. "What's happened, Pete?"

"Just go to the old trailer on Greenbow Street."

"Okay . . . but?"

"Go on, get started," ordered Pete. "I'm getting Roachy."

Roachy answered his call and quickly they were moving toward Greenbow Street.

"Jeez," muttered Roachy after the details had been given him. "Are we really gonna give Rock the big push?"

Pete smiled carefully, wondering if his lips were properly slitted. They just felt blubbery against his teeth.

"Say," said Roachy. "Monty said he got something to tell you."

Pete nodded absently.

"Ain't you gonna see what he wants?" said Roachy, pointing to the pool room across the street.

They crossed the street, walked into the gloom of the pool room. A dance tune coming from the radio harshly toned the large room. The clicking of pool balls penetrating the low hum of conversation as effectively as the music blared away any civil tone.

"Got something to tell me?" Pete said loudly to the very old, very thin man behind the narrow cigar counter.

"Yeah," said Monty. "A little guy was in here asking for you. He didn't know your last name but he almost described you to a T. He said you got brown hair, described your built good too. What'd you do, Petey?"

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"What did he want with me?" asked Pete softly.

"Something personal." The old man smiled. "He wouldn't say."

"Was he tough looking?"

"You can't go much by looks." Monty chuckled, running his stiff fingers over his pigeon chest. He continued gently, "This guy was 'bout five eight, but he had a crisp way of talking. He kinda made you wanta say yes-sir or no-sir."

"Copper," slammed out Roachy.

"Get the hell outta here," barked Monty. "You punks are too smart for your age nowadays. Get out."

"What did you tell him, Monty?" Pete asked, almost catching Monty's dangerous inflection of tone.

"Not a damn thing," said Monty, pointing to the door. "Now get."

Outside, they walked silently side by side, their arms heedlessly jostling each other as they moved quickly toward Greenbow Street.

They walked up the silent street. The huge factory buildings on either side vibrated slightly from the vast amount of machinery in operation within, but once accustomed to these deep, almost inaudible, rumblings they paid no attention to them.

"Jeez," said Roachy, "this street always gives me the creeps. Just think! There's hunnerds, maybe thousands, of guys working in those sweatshops and you don't see any of 'em by the windows."

Pete's gaze darted upward; he forced his eyes away from the dirty windows. "Sure." He laughed with a bitterness that he could never have emulated purposely. "That's why us guys got to get our dough quick, maybe start up some kind of syndicate. I'll die first before I go to work in shops like these."

Roachy nodded. "There's the trailer."

They paused long enough to look up the narrow alley between two squat, average-sized factories toward the weedy, sloping, uneven, wide, empty space that comprised a hobo's dream of home. After nightfall the many little wooden shelters were peopled by the careless hordes of tramp adventurers.

They walked the weedy, sloping ground into a basin-like level which reminded Pete of almost every cowboy picture he had ever seen. He liked walking in this empty lot. You couldn't see the buildings from here, but you could look up and just see the sky, all blue with little white clouds that drifted like wreckage in technicolor movies.

They walked fifty feet to the edge of this plate-like plane indented between the sloping gravel heaps.

There, amid the knee-high, rank growth of weeds and shoulder-high mounds of dung-colored, sandy piles, stood the old trailer. Once it had been the pride of the Mulhooney freight lines. You could still make out the bold red of the Mulhooney trademark.

They went through the ajar doors of the rusty trailer and tried to bring into focus their friends' shapes.

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"Tony, Tommy," whispered Pete.

"Wait'll I light the candle, Pete," Tony croaked. A match flare sent shuddering shadows up the evilly warped sides and ceiling of the trailer.

"We're hot," growled Pete. "Boys, we gotta stay outta circulation for a while."

"They'll remember you, Pete," Tommy said. "You're the guy that powdered Rock."

Pete laughed. The shadows were comforting. Tall, bold, unflinching shadows that moved with your every motion. The impotent guardian angels of every man.

Pete swallowed carefully. "Tony?"

"Want a cig?" Tony said shakily. "We got some now."

"No." Pete felt the same raw delight he'd felt when he'd first attempted to shave, the same sensation as the powerful after-shave lotion burning into his cheeks. "Tell me everything your mother said."

"I told you," said Tony. "He wasn't Rock because she said he wasn't big. My Ma told him I went to the country, that she didn't know where. He said he had something personal to tell me."

"That's the same thing he told Monty," Roachy said.

"Dammit," whirred Pete, grabbing Roachy's arm and spinning him against the side of the trailer.

"What the hell is the matter with you?" yelled Roachy.

"You mean they're after you too?" cried Tony.

"Jeez," said Tommy prayerfully.

"Okay." Pete didn't waste a glance in Roachy's direction. "Did you tell your old lady that we were with you?"

"What difference would it make?" screeched Tony. "Everybody saw us over at the dock."

"Did you?" growled Pete.

"Yeah, I had to. I told her the truth."

"Think," said Pete, "what else did she say?"

"She said that he wouldn't drink some beer with her."

"He's a copper," Roachy said hollowly.

Pete's voice lashed out viciously. "You said that before, Roachy. How do you know?"

"'Cause coppers don't drink on duty."

Tommy laughed. "Wucko, the street cop's always in the tavern."

"Yeah, but this was a plainclothesman," husked Roachy. "Jeez, are we in trouble."

"Look." Pete gripped Tony's shoulders tightly. "You go home and tell your old lady that you're really going outta town. Tell her you'll try to get a job and make somethin' outta yourself."

"Gee." The darkness hid Tony's blush; the gee had been involuntary. "That's swell, Pete. Will we hop a freight tonight?"

"Yeah, Tony, just go on home and get your clothes."

"Gotta make it look good," agreed Tony, and he was quickly through the half-shut steel doors.

They waited for his forced haste to

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diminish in the still heat of the afternoon.

"Are we really going to leave town?" asked Roachy.

"You stupid baba," snapped Pete. "You had to spill the beans."

"What did I say?"

"You told him about the guy askin' for me at Monty's."

"Jeez, that don't mean nothing."

"Like hell it don't." Pete's voice was even, his tone murderous; he had practiced it often enough before the mirror in his bedroom. He hoped there was more light in the hulk of the trailer. "Don't you get it?" he continued. "Tony musta talked."

"Then what are we gonna do?" shrilled Tommy.

"Remember that I said we'd have to give Rock the big push if it came to him or us?" said Pete.

The shadows converged.

"Well, it ain't smart to push Rock," growled Pete. "He's got too many friends, and anyway we ain't got any guns."

"Then what?" said Roachy.

"Who's the only one who can spill the names of us guys?" Pete said, eagerly picking up the dramatic cue.

Roachy said stiffly, "You mean Tony?"

"He's the only guy," said Pete. "That's why I didn't want him to know that Rock was getting close to me too." He paused thoughtfully. "He's going home now and telling his old lady that he's leaving town. When he gets back here I'll put the shiv into him before he knows what hit him. We can bury him out here tonight. If they find his body the cops'll blame the hobos."

In the candlelight their faces were white, milk white. For the first time in their lives they couldn't thwart their plans with the thought of food and clean rooms and steam-heated flats. The acute, perpetual need of food was iced from their bellies. Fear crookedly steadied their faces; the boyish cast was gone from their visages. They were men now, taking a step that was the only action that would absolve them.

"You going to do it?" Roachy's voice raggedly beat against the walls and tumbled down over their heads and shoulders.

"Yeah," said Pete. He took the pocket-knife from his hip pocket, opened it. "There's a certain spot in the back."

"I — I'll wait outside for him," Tommy said with a detached tone that steadied the ache from swirling to his throat and choking him.

"If you can't take it, okay," said Pete.

"Okay, I'll stay," said Tommy. God, what if Pete thought he'd run away and tell. No. "Sure I'll stay, Pete. What do you think I am?"

"Okay."

Somehow a chill wind sliced through the blackness of the hulk, blotting out the light.

"What if Tony told his mother that he was leaving town with us, Pete?"

Pete didn't recognize the voice. He swore. It hadn't been one of his

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friends. It sounded almost like Monty's dead, old voice.

"Who said that?" Pete yelled.

"I did. Me, Tommy."

The candle was relit.

"I'll ask him when he comes back," said Pete. "Don't get jumpy over everything. We gotta keep cool. Remember: If you make a slip or get scared, you're stretching your own neck. We gotta stick together."

That, thought Pete, was a smart little speech. He almost felt happy, but the hardness of the haft of the knife against his palm reminded him of his chore. He lapsed into silence.

Then Tony stormed in. "Got my extra pair of pants and two shirts, even a dollar. When do we get started? It's almost dark now."

"Did you tell your mother that you were blowing town with us?" Pete asked very, very gently.

"Naw." Tony's voice was happy, almost tender with affection toward his buddies. "I couldn't; she woulda thought I was just going to bum around with you guys. I told her I was going by myself."

"Where did you tell her you were going?" Pete said.

"Told her I didn't know."

"Got something to show you, Tony. Come over here."

"Bring it near the candle, Pete. I can't see in the dark good yet."

"I'll light a match, Tony."

"Okay, Pete."

The air moved sluggishly in the trailer. Tony walked toward Pete, causing air currents to brush across Tommy's and Roachy's faces. Tommy tried to trip Tony — anything to keep him away from Pete — but he misjudged the distance in the gloom and Tony was facing Pete.

"*Owww*," cried Tony, "my shirt musta stuck to my back. Jeez, it almost hurts bad."

Tommy and Roachy jumped to their feet.

Pete reached for the knife hilt which was fast against Tony's back, drew it out quickly.

Tony screamed. "What happened . . . a rat . . . guys, a rat bit me . . . gotta get to a hospital."

Pete slashed the blade against Tony's throat. Why hadn't he thought of that before? The jugular vein was difficult to miss with a slashing sweep of the blade at such close quarters.

Tony crashed against the wall. Finally he slid to the floor.

"We shouldn'ta," sobbed Tommy. "Oh, God, please forgive me. I didn't mean to. Oh, God, please, God. I'll go to Church every Sunday, please, God."

Pete stooped over and placed the red knife next to the candle and turned to Tommy, slashing viciously across his face with clenched fists. All the suppressed rage that came from killing a guy who wouldn't admit he was dying surged through his veins. He beat his fists against Tommy's nose, eyes, ears, neck. Tommy began to slide down the side of the trailer.

Pete held him; once, twice, again and again he slashed at the black blob before him with fists made of iron.

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Then his arm was too weak to hold him up any longer. He allowed Tommy to thump to the floor.

Pete slumped down next to the flickering candle. He looked up. Roachy had the knife in his hand.

"Don't try anything with me, Pete."

"I hadda slug him, Tom. He was pa-pa-panicky."

It was dark out when Tommy started to mumble. They quickly slapped him into consciousness.

"What happened?" Tommy asked.

"You went outta your head," said Pete. "I hadda slug you."

"Okay, Pete."

"We gotta bury Tony now," Pete said.

"I'm too weak," said Tommy.

"We'll do it," said Roachy, leaning over and patting him on the shoulder. "Just take it easy, Tom."

Pete went out; no one was in sight. He called to Roachy. "We'll have to bury him near the trailer," grated Pete. "We haveta . . . I ain't got much strength left."

"Me neither," mumbled Roachy.

With their hands they clawed at the weeds, getting into the comparative softness of the dirt below. Finally they were leaning, elbow deep, into the hole to bring the dirt out.

"This is far enough," wheezed Pete. "Let's throw him in."

Roachy complied, dragging Tony's leaden body toward the shallow pit. Pete rose from the ground and helped Roachy tumble him into his grave.

Frantically they covered the hole, tossing débris and the scattered weeds over Tony's shoddy grave.

Roachy fell to his knees over the loose dirt. He spoke aloud, evenly. "God, I guess I'm a killer too. I couldn't stop Pete f-from doing it to Tony. If you wanta do anything to me, just go ahead. I ain't complaining. I'm going to be good, God, even try to be a priest. I ain't no killer, God."

Pete screamed savagely, hurling his body toward Roachy. They thrashed and twisted over Tony's grave, biting and gouging, the rusty cans and sharp gravel tearing into their bodies.

. . . Roachy rose slowly, glanced down at Pete. He was out. "Tommy, Tommy," he called weakly.

Tommy appeared at the iron swinging-door of the trailer, clutching at the panel for support. He stumbled toward Roachy.

"Gotta bring him around," screamed Roachy. "Go on — slap him around."

Tommy fell to his knees, pinched Pete's bleeding face, slapped his lax mouth. Pete stirred slightly.

Then they were leaving the darkened lot, their faces clotted with blood, their clothes tattered.

As they reached the mouth of the alleyway leading to the street of factories Tommy halted abruptly. "What about that little bundle of clothes Tony brought with him?"

"Might as well leave it there," Pete said, trying to keep his eyes from twitching by heeling them with his blood-crusted hands.

"Fingerprints?" said Tommy.

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Pete laughed. His body was a swollen mass of skin and bones, but it was forgotten. "We fooled around that trailer before lots of times. Our prints were there before tonight."

"But the candle?" Roachy's voice sapped through. "And maybe the cops can tell fresh prints."

Pete stripped the remnants of his shirt from his torso and back. "Wait here for me," he said. "I'll go back, get the candle and do a little wipe-up job."

They didn't glance at his retreating figure.

"Why did you and Pete fight?" Tommy said thickly, the gash on his lip reopening with the movement of his lips. The blood went unnoticed, quickly seeping down his chin.

" 'Cause I prayed."

"I did too, Roachy."

"I'm going to be a priest, Tommy." It was good saying Tommy's name.

"I'll come with you, Roachy."

"Let's go to Church from now on, Tommy."

"Try and stop me."

Tears went down their cheeks, burning down the welts that streaked their faces.

Then Pete was with them again.

"I wiped up as much of the place as I could and threw the candle away from the trailer. The cops are gonna pull us in."

"What will we say?" said Tommy.

"That we didn't see him tonight."

"Yeah," agreed Roachy. "Then his old lady'll say he left town, and the cops will think he just slept here for a night and the hobos killed him."

Pete laughed. "They won't find Tony for a long time — maybe never."

They didn't exchange a word until the wide streets of their own neighborhood materialized before them. A bolt of lightning shattered the night's quiet. Rain hosed down . . .

They must have just been standing there, for Tommy remembered when it had been just a thin drizzle.

They separated, each going to his own home. It wasn't a house tonight. It was their last and only haven.

The rain kept them awake for long agonizing periods.

Finally they slept.

Next morning Pete was sitting on the back porch of the basement flat which was level with the backyard. The rain had mudded the backyard and the wind still hissed damply.

He glanced at the sky. It was black. He didn't feel like eating, smoking, or thinking.

He was sitting at the enamel-topped table in the kitchen with his burning forehead against the coolness of the table top when the two large men entered through the open door.

"Your name Peter Semo, kid?"

"Yes."

"Come along."

"Who're you?" Pete said slowly; he had to keep a good grip.

The shorter one brought out his wallet, flipped it open; a badge was attached to it. Pete went along meekly.

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The station house was big; the desk sergeant didn't look as sappy as movie desk sergeants. He looked sore. The cops floating around the room didn't talk to each other. And guys with cameras took his picture.

"In here," said the larger detective, after he had posed with Pete for the picture.

The office was large and the man seated behind the steel desk was broad-shouldered and wore glasses. He looked like a piano-playing halfback who's ready to stomp or grin at a moment's notice.

"I'm Lieutenant Pierce," he said good-naturedly. "How old are you, Pete?"

Pete's tongue wallowed uncertainly in his mouth. "Sixteen, sir."

"What happened to your face, son?"

Pete ran a hand over his swollen, taped face. "Hadda little argument with the gang — my pals."

"What about?"

"They just acted smart."

"You the Big Head, Pete?"

"Yessir, I'm sorta chief, we hang out together."

"Too bad about Tony," Pierce said very gently. "He in your gang too?"

Pete forced the rampant thought from his mind that Tony's body had been found. They couldn't have.

"What about Tony?" said Pete. His voice sounded okay.

"Some hobos found his body near an old abandoned trailer in the Bo jungle near Greenbow Street," Pierce said with a detached tone.

"Jeez, is he okay now?"

"He was stabbed twice," said Pierce, lighting a cigarette. "You smoke, Pete?"

"Nosir."

"Fine." He smiled nicely. "Oh, yes, we have your friends Tommy and Louis — guess you boys call him Roachy."

"Yessir."

Pierce exhaled noisily, the smoke swirling over Pete's head. "Was it a serious quarrel you boys had, Pete?"

"Nosir."

"You're all pretty well banged up, and Tony's dead. Why did you knife him, Pete?"

They had squealed. One of them must have. How could the cops have found the body so soon? Pierce was lying about the hobos finding it — that was it — nobody could have found Tony's body so soon. But if anybody had blabbed, it would be Tommy. He'd even prayed when Pete had jabbed the knife into —

"Come on," Pierce's voice lashed out. "Your friends admitted you put the knife into Tony. I haven't all day to waste on you."

"I didn't," cried Pete. "Honest to God, mister. I didn't!"

Pierce sighed wearily. "You did have a knife, didn't you?"

"Nosir, I didn't. When I was a kid I did, but my pa made me throw it away." *Thank God,* he'd thrown that knife down the sewer.

"Quit lying." Pierce rose, walked around the desk, stood over him.

Here it came. Pete steadied himself.

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They could kick him around all they wanted. Nobody talked on a murder rap. *But somebody had.* Maybe they did have him dead to rights, but the cops always used that old trick of saying your friends squealed on you. But *he* knew Tony was dead. How did he know? How?

"I didn't do nothing," said Pete.

"You and your friends' fingerprints were all over that trailer."

"We goofed around there. But at night bums sleep in there."

Pierce stared at his palm, brought it before Pete's eyes. "Don't try and pin this on the bos," said Pierce, "they notified us of the dead kid. Tony even had a buck on him. If bums had killed him they would have taken the money and blew town."

"Maybe they're being smart," Pete shrilled, coiling back into the chair away from that large, square hand. "Maybe they 'phoned you justa clear themselves."

"You see too many movies," Pierce snapped. "There's a difference between bums and hobos. Hobos just don't work but they don't panhandle like bums. The boss of the hobos notified us. C'mon, kid, spill it."

"Honest to God I didn't kill him," Pete shouted, trying to evade the hand that was a fraction from meeting his nose.

Pierce turned quickly, pressed a buzzer, and told the patrolman who entered to bring in Tommy and Roachy.

Two big plainclothesmen steered Tommy and Roachy before Pete.

Pierce pointed to Pete, roared: "This guy stabbed that kid, didn't he?"

They remained silent. Pete's stomach jelled warmly; Pierce *had* been trapping him with the idea that the guys had talked.

Pierce cleared his throat. "Did you do it, Tommy?"

"No-o, sir."

He whirled on Roachy. "You?"

"No, honest, I didn't."

Pierce looked down at Pete. "You're a smart kid," he said. "You kids are all banged up from a fight. You all admitted you fought among yourselves. How come there wasn't a scratch on Tony other than the knife slashes?"

"We didn't do that," Roachy said, staring at Pete.

Tommy tried to look away from Pete but the trembling lips, the glistening white face, were too strong an attraction.

"They're covering up for themselves," cried out Pete. "You gotta believe me, mister."

"Rat," snarled Roachy. "He did it, Lieutenant. We couldn't stop him. You see we got a job by the pier and . . ."

The police stenographer was called in and Roachy repeated the story.

Roachy and Tommy were taken from the room.

"Okay, Pete," Pierce said gravely.

All they had was Roachy's and Tommy's word against his.

"It was in self-defense," said Pete quietly; he hadda keep cool. "I know

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what you're thinkin', but it ain't right. Tony's a husky guy, it was dark in the trailer — that's where we had the fight — he had me on the floor and woulda killed me. I got him first with a knife."

"No dice, kid. Your pals say you beat up Tommy after you knifed Tony, and that Roachy jumped you after you buried Tony."

"They're lying! You gotta believe me!"

Pierce smiled at the male stenographer. "Did you get it all, Mike?"

The stranger nodded, lighting a cigarette.

"But it was self-defense," choked Pete. "Honest, mister."

"Well, that's the D.A.'s job to figure," said Pierce. "But listen, kid, I'll give you a tip. You better plead guilty. You might get a break — maybe one to fourteen."

"May I interrupt, Lieutenant?" the stenographer said.

Pierce nodded. "Go ahead, Mike."

"Have you got a lawyer, son?" asked the stenographer.

"Jeez, does my old man know?"

"He won't have anything to do with you," said Pierce. "I don't blame him. He works hard to keep you eating."

Pete laughed. "Okay, I know. Get me a city shyster, it's the law."

"Yeah, it's the law," said Pierce.

Pete's eyes were wide, lifeless; his hands were limp, almost reaching to the floor. "How come they found Tony so quick?" he droned. It was over now.

"The rain was pretty hard last night," Pierce said. "It loosened the dirt and Tony's hand was sticking out from the mud when the hobos came to repair their shacks after the storm this morning."

Pete laughed loudly; his legs were wet. "*Gotta cig?*"

The stenographer tossed him the pack of cigarettes.

Pete lit one, inhaling deeply. The room twirled, he felt the cigarette drop from his mouth; he hadda pick it up. He reached over, crumbled to the floor.

Pierce dragged him up, slapping his face quickly. "C'mon, kid, save that for the jury. Now, give me the story straight."

"Okay, okay, you don't have to hit me."

Fifteen minutes later the stenographer re-read his notes. Pierce was grinning.

"Throw him in box A," ordered Pierce. And when the policemen had taken Pete away he turned to the stenographer. "And, Mike, send in the reporters."

Mrs. Margaret Ovaki stared at the chipped sugar bowl before her fingertips. Tony was dead. She thought of his father. God rest his soul.

She glanced at the alarm clock ticking nervously on the shelf over the sink. It was 10:30 p.m. The blessed dark of night had finally fallen, the reporters had gone. She should be on the street car now, riding to the loop . . . and then she should be taking

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the pail and scrubbing-brush and washing the marble floor.

A light double rap on the door penetrated her thoughts.

"Go away, I don't want to talk to anybody."

"Please," the voice called, "it's urgent."

She rose and shuffled to the door, swung it open.

The little man still wore the same dark blue suit he'd worn when he'd come asking for Tony yesterday afternoon.

She mouthed an oath, but it failed to burst into sound. "You — you get outta here."

"Mrs. Ovaki, please listen to me."

She slumped into the chair.

He began abruptly. "The papers had the whole story. Did you read it?"

She shook her head from side to side.

"It said," he went on hastily, "that your boy and the other three worked at the Wong warehouse yesterday for a couple of hours — two to be exact. That they had a fight with Rocky, our foreman, and that they ran into hiding fearing that Rock might get back at them through your boy. I know that Rock's a trouble-maker. He —"

"Get outta here."

"But Mrs. Ovaki," he pleaded. "I must clear my conscience. I didn't come here yesterday to cause trouble for the boys. I just dropped over to give your son the four dollars they earned — he was to give his friends their rightful shares. You see, I'm the personnel manager and I always do right by the men who work —"

She lunged for the sugar-bowl.

He bumped into the door, ducked as the bowl crashed over his head, sugar covering his head and shoulders.

"All right," he shrieked. "I'll mail the check to you."

She lumbered into the bedroom, slowly reclined on the bed; she twisted over, her face crashing into the stiff coolness of the pillow.

The bed cringed under her great weight. They wouldn't expect her down at work tonight — she could sleep.

The black cat slid through the opening of the ajar door and eagerly lapped up the sugar that the moistness of the wall had slightly watered . . .

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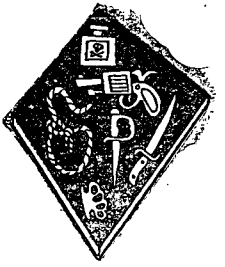
THOUGH THIS BE METHOD, YET THERE IS MADNESS IN 'T



Most detective and crime stories employ the garden-varieties of murder methods: the bromidic bullet, bludgeon, and blunt instrument; the stereotyped stabbing; the hackneyed hands — by pushing or strangling; the mechanical device — by running over, squashing, decapitating, or untidily tearing limb from limb; and so on. Occasionally, however, an author hits upon an unusual method, and we cannot help but be startled. Dorothy L. Sayers, in her brilliant Introduction to GREAT STORIES OF DETECTION, MYSTERY AND HORROR: FIRST SERIES *(known in America as* THE OMNIBUS OF CRIME*), listed "a brief selection of handy short cuts to the grave," all of them unusual — or, at least, unusual when first used. By this time most of you are more or less familiar with "poisoned tooth-stoppings; licking poisoned stamps; shaving-brushes inoculated with dread diseases; poisoned boiled eggs (a bright thought); poison-gas; a cat with poisoned claws; poisoned mattresses;" and to get away from poisons, which lend themselves so easily to gimmickry, "knives dropped through the ceiling; stabbing with a sharp icicle; electrocution by telephone; biting by plague-rats and typhoid-carrying lice; boiling lead in the ears (much more effective than cursed hebanon in a vial); air-bubbles injected into the arteries; explosion of a gigantic 'Prince Rupert's drop'; frightening to death; hanging head-downwards; freezing to atoms in liquid air; hypodermic injections shot from air-guns; exposure, while insensible, to extreme cold; guns concealed in cameras [to say nothing of lethal weapons concealed in canes, umbrellas, and crutches!]; a thermometer which explodes a bomb when the temperature of the room reaches a certain height; and so forth."*

This catalogue of unusual short cuts to the coffin could be extended indefinitely. You will no doubt remember Anthony Wynne's classic use of anaphylactic shock in "The Cyprian Bees"; Ronald A. Knox's murder by starvation in "Solved by Inspection"; Dorothy L. Sayers's own "new idea for a murder" — transfusion of the wrong type of blood — in "Blood Sacrifice"; Melville Davisson Post's combustion power of the sun in "The Doomdorf Mystery" (although, believe it or not, this method was first used by M. McDonnell Bodkin in a Paul Beck short story, "Murder by Proxy," as early as 1898!); E. C. Bentley's loaded golf club in "The Sweet Shot"; Agatha Christie's electrified chess piece in THE BIG FOUR; *Marc Connelly's*

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diabolical shortening of a walking stick in "Coroner's Inquest"; and so on, almost ad infinitum.

And, yes, we mustn't forget: there is an extraordinary method of murder in Donn Byrne's virtually unknown "The Brown Box"; whoever opened the ancient case — faded, mildewed, embossed, scrolled with crescent-shaped Arabic script, and locked with automatic Damascan bolts and tumblers — whoever threw back the heavy lid, died suddenly, spontaneously. No poison, no explosive, no actual weapon of any kind — indeed, the cause of death is unique in murder fiction. No, we won't tell you: this is one murderous memorandum worth your looking up in the original text.

But if we kept on listing all the unusual means we could fish out of our memory or find among our notes, it is unlikely that we would come upon a duplication of the mortal method invented by Hector Bolitho in his story, "Dirge." "There are things," as Dorothy L. Sayers once wrote, "beyond the power even of a coroner to imagine or of a coroner's jury to believe" — in London, New York, or the Congo. And Hector Bolitho learned some of these things during his extensive travels throughout the world.

DIRGE

by HECTOR BOLITHO

A LETHARGIC swell ruled oncoming lines across the ocean, a swell so peaceful that the surface rose and fell as gently as the breast of a sleeping child. The water finally broke into waves which moved indolently towards the Congo coast. They made the finest possible white rim of foam when they broke upon the sand. The visible circle of sea was tremendous, for there were no clouds in the sky and no mists upon the water. Far out, helpless as a twig, a small, dirty boat rose and fell in obedience to the movement of the tide. A half-caste woman sat in the stern of the boat, staring out into the hot space. She could see nothing but the sea and sky, laced together on the distant edge with what seemed to be a silver ribbon. For an hour she peered, her hand over her eyes, her black hair falling down over her back, her dingy black cotton blouse stained with the white of dried salt water. Then she looked into the boat itself. In the bows, asleep, perhaps unconscious, was the figure of Reek Dryden. She watched his ugly, purple face with the passivity of habit: she had been married to him

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too long to reveal any sensation of hatred upon her face. He might have stirred at any moment. Then it would all have begun again: the raving and the screaming. She could not have borne a refreshed attack of his drunken insolence. She took a rope out of the locker and tied him to the seats, his arms to one and his feet to the other. She returned to the stern and squatted there, her elbows upon her knees, her chin in her hands. She was far enough away from him now. For still another hour her sad cold eyes looked out toward the limit of sight. As far as she could see, there might be no world left, no people; only this brilliantly lighted space between the lofty blue sky and the sea.

The boat drifted and once it came to the edge of a great floating island of flotsam and jetsam. So tightly packed was the floating rubbish that it looked solid and safe. Rita Dryden looked down into the water. They were drifting into the chaos of filth; old fish baskets, torn canvas, twigs and ends of rope retained their identity in the vast floating mass. Something of character and movement stared at her out of the jetsam. She saw two immense eyes, crafty, patient eyes, looking at her. A gray-white mass stirred and a long, terrible arm moved gracefully in the water. Then another arm moved out from the shadow of the stinking mass. She could see a beak, and more and more arms.

She picked up the oars and rowed away from the octopus. The boat rose and fell on the clear water. When she knew that they could not drift near the tangle again, she sat on the bottom of the boat and went to sleep.

Rita Dryden had been found by a missionary on the fringe of a jungle in the Congo Basin; thus vaguely did she know whence she came. When she was older, all that the missionary could tell her was that he had walked from the sunshine into the cool arches of the jungle to pick some orchids. He had found her naked and forsaken, sleeping in the undergrowth. He had carried her to the mission station and there she had been dressed in a pink cotton dress and brought up as a Methodist.

In those days Reek Dryden owned a stinking cargo boat, which threaded its dishonest way through the waterways of the Congo, up slow-running tributaries where he worked; always at war with missionaries and traders. He represented a degree of moral outlaw to which none of them dared aspire. Rita Dryden had all the veneer of the mission school: a string of beads about her neck and her head full of Sankey and Moody hymns. She sang "Shall we gather at the river?" in a pure contralto voice. She achieved a superficial sense of physical modesty and a parrot-like ability to quote the proverbs which the starched missionary lady had taught her. Her contacts with human beings had thus far been peaceful. It was true that she had stolen and lied, when the discipline of

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the mission school obliged her to: otherwise she would have lost all freedom. In all the sixteen years she was at school, neither the missionaries nor Rita herself suspected that the dark powers of a fiend were within her. Yet the powers were there, despite the hymns and the proverbs: powers which she had inherited from her mother, who had gone off into the jungle with a white man, wooed and bewildered by his softly spoken promises. That was back in the old days, when her black uncles still walked silently through the forest, with smoked human legs slung over their backs, for marching food.

On her sixteenth birthday Rita Dryden was allowed to walk alone beyond the mission gates. Her first delight was to go to the river bank to see the sights.

She had loveliness of a kind and she walked impudently. Reek Dryden was the first man to observe her beauty, when he happened to look out of the porthole. He twirled his mustaches with a seducer's vanity. Lurching up on to the deck, he spoke to the girl and enticed her on board the *Vanity Belle*. From that moment the teaching of the missionaries counted for nothing with her: she went back to the mission station, collected her blouses and beads, her whistle and her ribbons and, leaving her New Testament on the dressing table, she returned to the river bank. She accepted the invitation to go to Reek Dryden's little boat, and in the darkness of the night the *Vanity Belle* moved down stream among the interminable channels, towards the sea.

Nobody in the world liked Reek Dryden. He had begun his life in Cape Town as a fisherman, professedly honest in the beginning. But there had been a stolen net and a quarrel out in the secret spaces of the night. A boat had drifted back, one man short, and before a surge of suspicion and his fear of the law, Reek Dryden had disappeared up the coast. In ten years he owned his own schooner: the story of his cruelty was left in every port or bay or river towards which his boat set its bows. There were hints of slave trading and proofs of gun-running against him. Once when he had had trouble with a black boy he had taken on board, he had hoisted one of the victim's black, bleeding hands to the top of the mast as a warning to others in the village. The people were dependent upon him for wages and supplies, and they were afraid.

Rita Dryden cooked for Dryden and she worked for him. For two years she suffered the physical penalties of her marriage. In these things she was docile and obedient. But when his drunk hands touched her, she tightened every muscle in her body, until her hatred seemed to frighten his hands away from her. She had sat back for five years in dumb patience, watching the decay of his senses. Once she had seen a witch doctor "go mad," screaming with a voice that seemed to split the air.

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She had been thrilled. She had been no more than a child then, but, with ecstasy upon her face, she had watched the demented charlatan hitting his hands against the rock. When she watched Reek Dryden move about in the little cabin, she unconsciously waited for the time when he too would dash himself against a wall or beam and destroy himself. Yet she did not want him to die. The hatred which was strong in her was too bitter and subtle to wish for finality or death. She just wanted to see Dryden drop to the final, witless depth of life, and stay there.

It was the lapping and murmuring of the sea that he hated; he could hear it licking the ship when he sat at the table, moving greasy cards about in an unintelligible game which he had learned in his fishing days. The sickly, yellow lamp swung like a pendulum over his head. His shadow moved over the surface of the table and Rita Dryden sat somewhere in the background and watched him. Sometimes he would turn and listen to the slow murmur of the sea outside, and the faint slapping of the water against the hull. Once he turned to her with a gentle, resigned note in his voice. "That bloody sea, it will get me yet," he had said. Then he would remember a day when he had been a boy. He had been playing on the beach in Cape Town with his mother, when he had run to her with a sea shell, holding it against his ear, entranced by the sound he had discovered. She had dashed the shell out of his hand saying, "No, not yet! It drove your father daft. You'll never be a sailor. Not you too."

At night he'd lie on his bunk with the blankets piled up behind him against the wall of the cabin. The bed was seldom made and seldom renewed. Reek Dryden would turn in his dreams, always with the dirge of the sea in his ears. When he went on shore and roamed among low, inland drinking hovels, where the sea could not be heard, he was a different man. But he was a daft loon on the filthy boat, with its ripped, flapping sails; so mad and cruel that there came a time when the crew mutinied against him.

He had been saved knowledge of all that happened, for somebody had hit him as he sat over the table under the swinging yellow lamp. He had not awakened until he was alone with Rita, marooned in the little boat. Even now, lying in the bow of the dinghy, rising and falling, his fuddled brain was still leaning over the table, holding the cards between his thumb and first finger. They had put Rita with him because she had always been a liar, telling Dryden this or that tale about them, mentioning them by name, to induce him to give her a drink of the sickly, warm port which he kept locked underneath his bunk. They had put her with him in the boat and then they had sailed off in the rotting schooner, with the incongruous name of *Vanity Belle* painted in blistering letters upon its bow.

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Reek Dryden moved a little and then he tried to sit up. The rope held him to the seats of the dinghy, but he could lift his head up far enough to look to the right and left. There was a cliff, still indistinct in the distance.

They had drifted far in their long sleep. Dryden kicked his trussed feet against the bottom of the boat. He was calm now. Rita did not speak to him. He cursed her quietly, and she answered by taking the oars and moving to the centre seat, under which his feet were tied. She did not undo the ropes which held him. He went to sleep again, with the moaning of the sea against the bottom of the boat, monotonous as ever, droning in his ears. Yet he pressed his head closer to the wood to hear the sound more distinctly; the moan that he had known ever since he was a little boy, coming up from the immense depth. "Oh, God, stop that noise," he whimpered, without any curse, like a sad child, pleading.

Once Rita rested on her oars and looked at him again. She hated him so much that she scowled at the expanses of bare flesh, which she could see between his torn clothes. She became excited at the pleasure of having him thus, completely dependent upon her strength and care. When she had heard him whimper, "Oh, God, stop that noise, oh, stop that noise," she had smiled. She thought of the floating island and of the gray-white arms and the octopus eyes and hoped that some vision of such things hung behind Dryden's horror of the sea. He had been held to it because his sort of life was not a life for the shore. Men like him hung from wayside trees, if they did not go to sea. Or they were stabbed in their beds by the black men of her own race. With all the missionary teaching, her breed had an instinctive sense of justice, at times.

They moved in towards the shore and the gray-green mass of land became distinct; there was a place where the cliff sloped down to sand and trees.

When Rita eventually dragged Reek Dryden from the boat onto the sand, when he was released and was gentle and pitiful in his delirious weakness, she laughed. Then, because he was not looking, she laughed openly, to convince herself of her freedom to do so as she pleased.

While he was lying back against the sand, Rita bent down and picked up two shells. She tossed them into the air, and then held them against her ears so that she could hear their strange ocean voice. She smiled again and put them into the canvas bag which had been thrown to them in the boat; the canvas bag in which the biltong, the biscuits, and the bottle of water were carried.

The hut in the hills was seventy miles from the sea. When Reek Dryden was a little better, he could walk out, stand against the wall and look down into a quiet valley. He could hear the birds and the noises of

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animals, but there was no sea, no sound of the waves or of their moaning. He had escaped. Rita Dryden watched him sullenly and she sniggered at his pleasure. He was kind to her and he talked. His old cursing, spitting phrases ended; he helped her to mend the door and to wash the dishes.

She gave little in return for his efforts to help her; she answered him in slick, hard monosyllables, and she pushed his dish of food before him with ungracious roughness. He did not seem to notice these rebuffs. All that he knew was that the *Vanity Belle* had sailed away without him. The poison seemed to be drained out of his mind now. The sound of the sea, incessant as the torture of dripping water, had mesmerized him into his old villainies. Now, standing upon the crest of a hill or walking down to the water hole, with a gourd in his hands, he could hear the lap of the tide no more. The "green and yellow melancholy" was no longer his master.

Reek Dryden and his wife slept on opposite sides of the hut. Her straw bed was near to the door. She watched him with dark resentment, seeing the lines of anger and cruelty pass from his face as if they had been smoothed out of clay by a sculptor's hand. But she never shared his happiness nor did she cease to answer him with her sharp, unsympathetic voice, whenever he tried to cajole her or ask her to share the peace of his escape. There came a night when he made his last, pathetic effort to break past her silent resentment. He had walked out of the hut after their evening meal of fruit and fish. The hut was upon a wooded hill; outside were the sounds of the jungle, going to sleep. Leaning against the trunk of a tree, Reek spread his arms and smiled. He heard and knew the sounds of the darkness: the cry of the water fowl in the valley below, the discontented voices of birds, disturbed in their nests by the ominous crackling of twigs or the deeper sounds of animals.

"Come and listen, Rita," he had called. "Don't let us be bad friends. It is all over now. Come and listen here with me."

She had held her hands hard down upon the table, where she was standing, and she had grown more and more sullen as she listened to him. She hated him more now. She would not go out to him.

When the two chipped enamel plates were put back in the box, she threw herself down in the straw, and, turning to the wall, breathed slowly as if she were asleep.

It was almost midnight before the slow-moving, weak man came in. In his eyes there was some odd light; like the keen light in the eyes of a boy. It was a gentle knowledge that shone there. The dream, the black dream, with its persistent, accompanying dirge, was over. He went to bed and lay there for a long time, watching the rectangle of moonlight that came in through the rudely-cut window, enlarging itself upon the opposite wall. It moved as the

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angle of the rays changed, and his own face was framed in the patch of light. He was asleep then.

When she was certain that he was unconscious, Rita Dryden got up from her bed and walked over to him. She worked quietly for twenty minutes, tying his hands carefully to the side of the bed, his feet to the lower legs. As she drew the rope taut, she watched his face, white in the moonlight, to see if he stirred. She waited until there was a faint flicker of consciousness in his eyelids. She knew the rope was tight enough then.

He was crucified on his bed, with his arms outstretched. She could see his chest rising and falling, within his blue shirt. She went back to her bed. From beneath the straw she took the canvas bag she had brought with her from the *Vanity Belle*. The two shells were still there. She took them out and held them to her ears. The sea moaned again. She shut her eyes and saw the cabin of the *Vanity Belle*, the swinging lamp and Reek Dryden listening, with strained ears, to the dirge of the sea. "It will get me yet," he had said.

She lifted his head very gently and slipped a broad strip of cloth beneath it. She held the shells to her ears again. The sound of the sea was almost sweet to her now. She would go back to it; she'd find a boat to take her back to the rivers of the Congo Basin, without Reek Dryden. She put the shells against his ears. She warmed them against her breast first, in case the cold touch of them should wake him. Then, gently, she drew the strip around his head and tied it, with the shells pressed against his ears. His face moved. He was almost awake. Anyway, he could not move his body. She felt the rope that tied his hands. It was tight. Then she placed her hands against the shells on his ears and pressed them a little, as if she wished to hear the dirge again through her own hands. She knew it was sounding in his ears even then. She moved to the foot of the bed and felt the rope holding his feet. She tightened it a little. Then she took a longer strip of cloth and tied it too about his head. At the end she drew it so tight that he moved and awakened. But she held it with the brown muscles thumping in her wrists, and she tied it.

"Oh, God, stop it! Stop it! The sea, oh! God Almighty, it has come back!" he screamed.

But he could not move. She closed the door of the hut and walked down the hill. The power in her feet was tremendous. She walked; it seemed that she walked across the world before she climbed the faraway range of hills over which she found the sea. But she never turned. When three days had passed, she came to the crest of a hill. From there she looked down to the peaceful ocean coming in from the distance, blue, shimmering with sunlight. A battalion of birds rose from the sand dunes and flew, screeching over the water. She smiled and ran down the last slope, towards the waves and the white foam.

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KARMESIN, BLACKMAILER

by GERALD KERSH

A STREET photographer clicked his camera at us, and handed Karmesin a ticket. Karmesin simply said: "*Pfui!*" and passed it to me. It was a slip of green paper, printed as follows:

SNAPPO CANDID PHOTOS
3 Film Shots have been made of
YOU
by our cameraman
Post this ticket with 25 cents
to SNAPPO, JOHN ROAD,
for Three Lifelike Pictures.
Name . . . . . .
Address . . . . . .

"There is an opportunity for you," said Karmesin. "Procure nine or ten dummy cameras. Give them to nine or ten men, with your printed tickets. Have an accommodation address. A reasonable number of your tickets will come back with quarters. It will be quite a time before anybody complains. If someone does, explain: 'Pressure of business: millions of customers.' In three or four weeks you have made some money. Then you can start a mail-order business. By the time you are forty you may retire. *Voila!* I have set you up in life. I have done more for you than many fathers do for their sons. Give me a cigarette. Well, what are you laughing at?"

"Why don't you try the scheme yourself?"

Karmesin ignored this question and went on in an undertone: "On second thought, have real cameras and real films. That relieves you of the necessity for accomplices. Always avoid accomplices. Don't develop your film: just keep it. Then if the police come, you say indignantly: 'Look, here are the pictures. Give a man a chance to develop them!' In this manner you can last for two or three months. Never trust any man. Work alone. And speaking of photography, keep out of the range of cameras. They are dangerous."

"Why?"

"I once blackmailed a man by means of a camera."

I was silent. Karmesin's huge, plum-like eyeballs swiveled round as he looked at me. Under his mustache his lips curved. He said:

"You disapprove. Good! Ha!" and he let out a laugh which sounded like the bursting of a boiler.

I said: "I hate blackmailers."

"The man I blackmailed was a very bad man," said Karmesin.

"How bad?"

"He was a blackmailer," said Karmesin.

"Oh," was all I could say.

"It was a good example of the

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manner in which little fleas bite big fleas. The man whom he proposed to blackmail was myself."

"Make it a little clearer," I said.

"Certainly. It is very simple. We were going to blackmail Captain Crapaud, of the French Police. He, in his turn, was blackmailing a certain Minister. The man with whom I was working was a certain villain named Cherubini, also of the French Police. He, not content with blackmailing Captain Crapaud, also wanted to blackmail *me*."

"On what grounds?"

"He was going to blackmail me because I was blackmailing Captain Crapaud; and blackmail is a criminal offense, even in France. All he had to do was obtain evidence that I was blackmailing Crapaud."

"All this is very complicated."

"Not at all. It is childishly simple," said Karmesin; and having borrowed a cigarette, he proceeded to explain:

Captain Crapaud (said Karmesin) was a man for whom it was impossible to feel any sympathy. He was, if you will pardon the expression, a filthy pig. It is not usual to discover such men in high executive positions — in the police force of a great country, like France. But as you know, such things happen. He had acquired a sort of hold upon a very big politician of the period. And he was using this man for all he was worth, which was plenty. This Crapaud was playing the devil. Like that other police officer whose name, I think, was Mariani, he was using his office for purposes of personal profit. He organized burglaries, arranged the return of the loot, took rake-offs from this side and that. He was responsible for many murders. He was a dangerous man to play with — a French equivalent of Jonathan Wild.

There is the basis of the situation: Captain Crapaud was holding a certain power, to the detriment of law and order; and his power was built upon a certain incriminating letter which he held.

You understand that? Good.

Now Crapaud had an underling, a species of stooge, a wicked little Corsican named Cherubini. This Cherubini was also a bad man. He combined nearly all the vices and, as is usual in such cases, was always short of money, although his income was far in excess of the normal. You know the type: his dependents starve that he may bathe a couple of demimondaines in vintage champagne. *Pfui* on such wretches, I say! And *pfui* — and *pfui!* Tfoo! One spits at the very thought. Cherubini was little and rat-like. He had prominent front teeth, and no eyes worth mentioning. He would stop unhappy girls, and say "Be nice, or else. . . ." But he had a weakness for the more elegant type of woman; and that kind of weakness costs money. Always beware, my friend, of the underling with luxurious tastes, for the time will come when he will nail you to the cross.

I met Cherubini in Cannes. He

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was going around like a Hungarian millionaire: with gardenias, and a gold-headed stick, and a diamond in his cravat, and an emerald like a walnut on his finger, and real Amber perfume on his mustache; smoking a Corona Corona nearly as long as your arm; English clothes, English boots, silk shirts, polished nails — nothing was too good for this swine of a Cherubini.

I, needless to say, was a man of superlative elegance. I believe I have mentioned that my mustache was unrivaled in Europe. Yes, indeed, I am not exaggerating when I tell you that while dressing I used to keep my mustache out of the way by hanging it behind my ears. Nearly twenty-two inches, my friend, from tip to tip! However. It did not take me long to worm all the secrets out of the wretched little soul of this Cherubini. He was second in command to the unspeakable Crapaud. Yes. That, in itself, was bad enough. But he was a traitor even to his master.

I will cut it short. Crapaud had a hold upon the Minister . . . let us call him Monsieur Lamoureux. Follow this carefully. Crapaud also had a hold upon Cherubini. Do you get that? Good. The Minister Lamoureux wanted very much to break away from the clutches of Crapaud, and was prepared to pay heavy money for the letter which Crapaud held.

Was this letter procurable? No. But there was an alternative to procuring it, and that was, to incriminate Crapaud in such a manner that he would be glad to part with the letter incriminating the Minister.

But how could one incriminate Crapaud?

Cherubini had a plan.

There was one thing which, in France, could never be forgiven or forgotten; and that was Treason. Out of any other charge it was possible for a man with influence to wriggle; but not Treason. There was a spy scare at the time. (It was a little before the infamous Dreyfus affair.) If one could prove that Crapaud was receiving money from German agents, in return for information, then one had him.

"But is he?" I asked.

"Yes," said Cherubini, "Crapaud is the outlet through which so many confidential matters concerning internal policy leak through to Germany. He receives, in his apartment, Von Eberhardt of the German Embassy; and receives, in exchange for certain information, a certain sum of money. If only one could prove this."

I asked: "Have you means of getting into Crapaud's flat?"

"Yes."

"Then the whole matter is simple," I said. "Find out the exact moment when the money is likely to change hands — and take a photograph. A good photograph of Crapaud, taking money from Von Eberhardt, would be enough to hang him ten times over."

"Yes," said Cherubini.

"There is only one drawback," I

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said. "A camera is too cumbersome." This, you must remember, was before the days of the candid camera and the lightning snapshot.

"Not at all," said Cherubini. "The police in Paris are beginning to use the portable camera invented by Professor Hohler. This camera can be concealed under an ordinary overcoat and has a lens good enough to take a clear picture by strong gaslight."

"Can you get one?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"I am afraid," said Cherubini.

I paused; then asked: "How much would there be in this?"

"How much? Why, two or three hundred thousand francs," said this rat of a man.

"Then have no fear. I will take the photograph, if you get me into Crapaud's flat at the right time."

Bon. It was agreed.

We arranged to go to Paris together, and settle the affair.

"I have *entrée* to the flat," said Cherubini, "and I know it like the palm of my hand. It is simple." And he added: "But you must do the photography, mind."

All right. I will skip the tiresome details concerning the house, and so forth. It was a huge place in the Avenue Victor Hugo, with rooms as large as three rooms such as are built nowadays. The *salon* was like a football field — vast, I tell you, and most luxuriously carpeted. The furniture in that room alone must have been worth four or five thousand pounds. Rare stuff. This pig-dog of a Crapaud did himself well. Near the window there was a deep alcove, with another little window, or air-vent, at the back of it.

It was from this place that I was supposed to work. Cherubini had keys, and everything necessary. He also supplied me with the camera — a nice little piece of work not dissimilar to the Leica or Contax camera of the present day. I was smuggled into the alcove, and there I waited for four hours, not daring to move. It was not very comfortable, my friend. However, in due course Crapaud arrived, with his friend Von Eberhardt. They sat. I was admirably in line with them. They conversed. I photographed them. They drank. Again I photographed them. They patted each other on the shoulder. Click! Again. Crapaud took out an enormous gold cigar-case, and offered Von Eberhardt a cigar. Again, click! Then, at last, the German took from his pocket a large roll of banknotes, and held it between his thumb and forefinger. Crapaud grinned and produced a sheet of paper. Then as the paper and the money changed hands — click! Perfect.

Another hour passed before Von Eberhardt left. Then, as Crapaud went to escort his visitor to the door, I was up and out of the window, and away. You would never believe, looking at me now, how agile I used to be! I thought I saw another figure

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slinking away in the shadows, but the night was too dark. I got to the street, and walked quietly home, where I developed my plates.

They were beautiful. The glaring gaslight, amply reflected in a dozen mirrors, was perfect. The photographs were as clear as figures seen by strong sunlight.

The next day Cherubini came to see me. There was something in the manner of the wretch which disturbed me. He looked me up and down with an insolent grin, and said:

"Captain Crapaud's apartment was broken into last night."

"So?" I said.

"Watches, rings, trinkets, and money to the value of fifty thousand francs were stolen," said Cherubini.

"Yes?"

"You were in the apartment, Monsieur," said Cherubini.

"Oh?"

"Yes. You see, Monsieur, I was behind *you*, also with a camera."

"Indeed?" I said.

"Indeed. And I am afraid that it will be my duty to have you arrested for the crime."

"Oh?"

"Unless, of course, you are prepared to. . . ."

"Pay you off, I suppose?" I said.

"Fifty thousand francs," said Cherubini.

"And otherwise?"

"Listen, my friend," said Cherubini, throwing himself into a chair, "we are men of the world. I will put the cards on the table. The plates in your c[redacted] useless. You hav[redacted] the contrary, [redacted] ones of yourse[redacted] flat."

"Any decent [redacted] that case full of hole[redacted]

"Oh, no. Not by the [redacted] and I have finished with [redacted] said Cherubini. "Oh, my friend, you have no idea what evidence our boys would find, if once they searched your rooms."

"So I was caught, was I?" I asked.

"Like a fish in a net."

"But Von Eberhardt?"

Cherubini laughed. "Do you imagine that we would let you into the place with a camera? I mean, with a workable camera? With a camera loaded with proper plates? Be reasonable, Monsieur, be reasonable. There is nothing but your word, concerning Von Eberhardt. Who would believe you? No, no. You had better pay, my friend."

"And supposing I thought of all that beforehand, and took the precaution of changing the plates?" I asked.

"It would still have made no difference," said Cherubini. "The shutter of your camera would not work."

I rose, and seized him by the throat, slapped him in the face, and threw him to the floor.

"Listen," I said, "I would not trust you as far as I could see you. I saw through your game from the first. I had the shutter adjusted, the lens arranged, and the plates replaced. The camera was in perfect

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[redacted] u some pictures," [redacted] him.
[redacted] I said: "And [redacted] You remember [redacted] Von Eberhardt [redacted]
[redacted] said, and threw down a [redacted] It was an excellent photo. One could see Eberhardt, Crapaud, and the unmistakable luxury of the *salon*. "Take that magnifying glass and look at the cigar-case, my friend," I said. Cherubini took the large lens which I handed him and looked. Clearly defined in the polished lid of the case was *an image of Cherubini*, lurking behind the curtains, perfectly recognizable.

"Who wins?" I asked.

And Cherubini said: "You win."

"And now who goes to Devil's Island?" I asked.

Cherubini simply said: "How much for the plate?"

And I replied: "Tell Crapaud this: If he does not give me that letter of the Minister Lamoureux, then the day will come when one of his superior officers will hand him a revolver containing one cartridge."

"You are mad!" said Cherubini. Nevertheless, three days later Crapaud's nerve broke, and I got the letter, which I returned to the Minister.

I asked Karmesin: "What, you returned it free of charge?"

"Certainly," said Karmesin. "I simply asked him to pay my expenses."

"How much?"

"Chicken-feed. Fifty thousand francs," said Karmesin. "But am I a blackmailer? Bah."

"And Crapaud?"

"He left the country very suddenly and, I believe, came to an evil end in the Belgian Congo, in the time of the Congo Atrocities. Probably some cannibal ate him. Or a lion. Who knows? Perhaps an elephant trod on him. I hope so. He was a villain. He was also a fool. He overreached himself. I was not the first person whom he had tried to blackmail in that manner. Only he was a little too clever. It should be a lesson to you: never be *too* clever. Also, beware of cameras. And furthermore, remember the folly of Crapaud, and if ever you come into possession of an incriminating document, you will know what to do."

"What?"

"Photograph it immediately," said Karmesin.

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A PARASITE IS A SNOB . . .
— Anthony Trollope

Once upon a time (and it was not so many years ago) any attempt on the part of scholars, historians, or mere editors to link the names of great literary figures with the lowly detective story was greeted with impolite noises. Nobel Prize winners and Pulitzer Prize winners writing detective stories? Ridiculous twaddle and insidious propaganda! Yet in the eight short years since EQMM has practised what it has preached, we have proved the truth again and again and again — that literary snobbishness is the sin of critics, not of writers . . . Consider, if you will, the Nobel-Prize winners: six English and American authors have won the most coveted of all literary awards — an award made in the field, may we remind you, of idealistic literature; and of these, five — Rudyard Kipling, Sinclair Lewis, John Galsworthy, Eugene O'Neill, and Pearl S. Buck — have written tales (in the case of O'Neill, dramas) of crime or detection.

Consider, if you will, the winners of Pulitzer Prizes: every single one of the following has appeared in the pages of EQMM — Edith Wharton, Louis Bromfield, Elmer Rice, Marc Connelly, Susan Glaspell, T. S. Stribling, Stephen Vincent Benét, Ellen Glasgow, John Steinbeck, and soon we hope to bring you tales by Oliver La Farge and Robert E. Sherwood.

Oh, the literary snobs have conceded, in their patronizing way, that one of the earliest stories in the Bible is a tale of murder, and that it is possible, from a perverted point of view, to regard Shakespeare's "Hamlet" as a detective story — indeed, as a psychological thriller; but they laugh off these classical examples as prodigious freaks of nature. Perhaps murder can be judged a freak of nature, but paradoxically the study of murder, in all its fictional forms, is a compellingly instinctive and natural theme — and if murder comes, can the detective be far behind?

Yet the literary snobs, from their ivory towers leaning so Pisa-like in the clouds, look down their long noses at the detective story. But the writers, we repeat, don't. They recognize the detective story as a difficult and artistic medium, worthy of their sincerest efforts. How else explain that in addition to the famous literary figures mentioned above, EQMM has published detective-crime stories by Mark Twain, W. Somerset Maugham, Theodore Dreiser, H. G. Wells, Ernest Hemingway, J. B. Priestley, William Faulkner, James Hilton, Arnold Bennett, Charles G. Norris, John van Druten — an incomplete roster which does injustice to many other fine writers.

Snobbery, as Berton Braley has said, is the pride of those who are not

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sure of their position. How different the literary attitude to detective stories would be if the critics themselves could be persuaded to try *to write detective stories!*

Snobbery, said Isaac Goldberg, is but a point in time. Let us have patience with our inferiors. They are ourselves of yesterday . . .

Detective-crime stories written by the famous names of literature are usually of two types. Tales like Maugham's "Footprints in the Jungle," Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers," Hemingway's "The Killers," Faulkner's "The Hound," and Steinbeck's "The Murder" belong to the higher levels, if not the highest levels, of their authors' literary development. The other type of detective-crime story written by celebrated literary figures belongs to the authors' salad days — when the writers were doing experimental, transitional, or formative work.

The story by Stephen Vincent Benét which we reprinted previously — "The Amateur of Crime" — was one of Mr. Benét's early stories, first published in 1927. The Stephen Vincent Benét tale we now offer is an even earlier effort; it first appeared in a pulp magazine in 1924 — yet only four years before JOHN BROWN'S BODY, *although thirteen years ahead of* THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER.

Admittedly — and we have no hesitation in stressing the fact — "Floor, Please" is not representative of Stephen Vincent Benét's fully developed talent. Its interest, both for the detective-story reader and the general reader, is chiefly incunabular. But wherever the tale may rank in the scale of Benét's literary achievement, it proves the catholicity and integrity of the author's work: for Stephen Vincent Benét, in company with virtually every other well-known and famous figure in literature, was not ashamed to write a detective story, not ashamed to sign his name to it, and not ashamed to have it reprinted many years after it was first written.

FLOOR, PLEASE

by STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

"FLOOR, please!" said Sally Bunch mechanically. Then she smiled. "Why, it's Mr. Cavendish! Hot, isn't it, Mr. Cavendish?"

The young man smiled in reply, displaying teeth so white and even that, as his personal stenographer had remarked, "it just wasn't right they were in a man." "Yes, it is hot," he remarked in his pleasant voice.

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Sally glowed.

"Those Palm Beach suits now," she proffered timidly. "I hope you don't think I'm fresh, Mr. Cavendish, but — well, I got a kid brother — he thought — are they really as cool now as the advertisements make out they are?"

Mr. Cavendish glanced over his quiet, expensive raiment appreciatively.

"Oh, yes, they're as cool as anything we poor devils of men can wear on a day like this. My floor? Good morning!"

He stepped out of the elevator, smiling. Sally dreamily revolved the wheel that closed the doors and started the elevator up again. As a matter of fact, she had no brother, but chances of a couple of minutes uninterrupted talk with a real gentleman like Mr. Cavendish were few. Even as it was, she had risked something — the proprietors of the Metal Products Building did not encourage talkativeness on the part of its elevator girls. "Complete refinement in deportment," said the little booklet on *Service*, "is a more than necessary adjunct for each and every one of our employees."

Sally sighed. She knew her deportment was not all that it should be, in spite of the correspondence course in *The Etiquette of Fashionable Society* she had just completed. But how were you ever going to get to know real swell people if you just stood on your feet all day long, like a dummy, and never opened your face?

Sally had been an elevator girl in the Metal Products Building for a little over a year. It was the "refinedness" of the thing — the opportunities for acquiring culture and social polish as well as, possibly, in the future, a real, "Ritzy" husband — that had appealed to her in taking the job in the first place. She not only had the normal American yearnings to rise above the station in which birth had placed her — she had original ideas on how it might be done and was strongly determined to do it.

There were plenty of millionaires who married their private secretaries, their nurses, even their cooks. She read about them in the papers — enviously. But Sally could not spell, sick people made her nervous, and she always got hot when she cooked. Very well, then, why not start a precedent herself? "Wealthy Clubman Weds Elevator Girl. Her Politeness Impressed Me From the First, Says New-made Benedict."

She could see it all now, with many pictures, on the front pages of all of the papers.

At first, the Metal Products Building had seemed to offer a happy hunting ground. The uniform she had to wear was becoming, the pay acceptable, and clients of wealth and refinement were in evidence throughout. The Metal Products Building was one of the very latest downtown skyscrapers. Hand-wrought bronze register gratings, vast marble columns in the entrance hall, indirect lighting from alabaster bowls; even Sally's

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elevator had the air of a Roman boudoir.

"Gee, this is the place for me!" thought Sally, when she first envisaged the ensemble.

But now that a year had passed, she began to wonder. It was easy enough to get acquainted, but most of the acquaintances were the wrong kind — fat, perspiring men who called her "sister" and leered when they were alone with her in the car — scrubby, uninteresting bookkeepers and filing clerks who, if she gave them half a chance, would doubtless display intentions as honorable as they were dull. Really, Sally thought, it was only Mr. Cavendish who kept her on the job.

She sighed again. He was certainly a darb. The perfection of his teeth when he smiled was what had first attracted her, she admitted. Girls were so silly. Or, maybe, it was his looks in general — handsome but manly — he wasn't one of those pretty-pretty boys. And his clothes! And his heavy, expensive English shoes! And his grand manners! And here he was — couldn't be more than thirty, and yet he was manager or something of the Continental Perfume Company on the eighth floor. That seemed a funny business, somehow, for a real man like him to be in, but then he had his artistic side, too. They'd talked about things, and he was always so nice and democratic with everybody.

Sally dreamed. To all appearances she opened and shut doors, sped up and down, said "Floor, please!" Really, however, she was rescuing a wounded, but uncomplaining, Mr. Cavendish from a burning building just as they do in the movies. Her reverie was rudely interrupted.

"Well, how's Nellie, the beautiful cloak model, today?" said a jarring voice.

Sally hardly bothered to turn her head. "Oh, hello, Mr. Considine," she said wearily. "The nineteenth?"

"Yea, my fair damsel, an' it please thee," said the sandy-haired young man with the Irish nose. "Old King Brady is on the trail again, and trouble may be expected to pop almost any time this morning. Say, Sally, when are you off?"

"Five thirty," said Sally mechanically. "Here's your floor."

The young man lingered. "Meet me at the trysting oak!" he murmured with an absurd gesture. "The Merrivale Street entrance, kid. I would have words with thee — words of import and gravity."

"Fat chance!" said Sally. She slammed the doors and shot upward. Billy Considine, she considered, was just the kind of bird that didn't get you anywhere! A little, fresh ham detective — an irritatingly unsquelchable hanger-on! No matter if she had had to tell him five times that she'd be a sister to him, tonight she positively wouldn't — she positively ——.

Five thirty found her sweeping haughtily out of the Merrivale Street entrance. But a block away she found herself taken affectionately by the arm.

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She turned freezingly. "Now, Billy Considine ——"

"Aw, Sally, be reasonable!"

"Billy, I told you ——"

"Aw, yes, but this is important."

She groaned exasperatedly. "Well?"

"Well, the chief just kicked through with a bonus on that bum check business. So how about Ugugli's and a couple of cups of red ink?"

"I beg your pardon. I am engaged for the evening."

"Aw, Sally, you're not! And then we could go to Harmonyland and shake a little toe or two."

Sally began to weaken. She loved to dance. "Well, Billy — only, you understand, it's the last time."

"Till the next time," said Billy, and grinned. "Right you are, my queen of the elevator shafts! How's the beautiful Mr. Cavendish today?"

It took him four subway stops to pacify her, but he managed it. There was something horribly persistent about Billy Considine. Later, discussing the dubious *antipasto* with which Ugugli's celebrated dollar dinner began, Sally found it necessary to be polite.

"How's the work going, Billy?"

"Like a breeze, my fair flower," said Billy gallantly, "like a Coney Island breeze." Then he grew more veracious. "And saps out in Hicksville Center think it must be the berries to be a private detective!" he groaned. "Oh, just so exciting and everything. Exciting — blah! This morning I get up in the night to go out and work on a fat Dutchman the chief thinks is up to some funny business or other. I trail him around all day, till Sullivan takes over the job, and the worst thing he does is to take a golf lesson at Mimbel's, with the thermometer up so high it fairly makes me drip every time I think of him. Then I write my report and quit — and, oh yes — strike the chief for my bonus, and he gives it to me all right, but says I've been dead on my feet all month, except for that one piece of luck, and to get busy from now forward, or I'll be sleeping out in the park. If they'd only give me a real case, once in a while."

He stabbed viciously at a flaccid slab of pimento. "How about you, Sal? Everything sittin' pretty?"

"Well, if you think *you* have a stupid time, Billy Considine! Seems to me every day I live's just like every other day, except for the date. Sometimes I think if they put me on the other shift — the expresses to the twentieth — things'd be different. But ——"

"Oh, there wouldn't be any difference," said Billy gloomily. "What's the use? If I could grab off a big bunch of kale — or get hold of a classy crime — I want to start my own agency, Sal — I know I could get away with it. I'm sick of these routine jobs. But you've got to have a rep to ——"

Thick, steamy soup replaced the *antipasto*. They talked on, hardly heeding each other.

"You know what the trouble is with you and me, Sally," Billy was saying; "the trouble with both of us,

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we haven't got enough incen — incentive — that's the big trouble. Now, Sally — aw, listen, Sally — if you'd ——"

"Oh, yes, if we got married and had an apartment in the Bronx — and a baby — *and* a phonograph on the pay-every-month-till-you're-dead system," said Sally, with tired scorn. "No, Billy, there's nothing in it."

"Aw, Sally, you're a lot too good for me — don't I know that? But if we got married we could sort of help each other — two of us. I'd just have to be a success if you married me, Sally. And there's a lot of jack in this agency business, once you get started right. Won't you, Sally?"

"You know I'll help you every way I can, Bill," said Sally, a trifle moved; "but ——"

"Aw, I know," said Billy acridly; "you needn't tell *me*. It's that Cavendish bimbo — that ya-ya, stuffed shirt, tooth-paste ad of a Cavendish. You used to listen to me before his fairy footsteps came into your life! He's a ——"

"Mr. Cavendish is a gentleman — a *real* gentleman — a man anyone should be *proud* to know!"

"Then what's he doing in a perfume works — playing he's a geranium? Sounds pretty funny to me."

"Mr. Cavendish intended to be a painter," said Sally stiffly. "He has very fine artistic tastes. He ——"

"A painter? Yeah, a sign-painter — that's about ——"

"If you persist in insulting my personal friends, Billy ——"

"Oh, all right," grumbled Billy unwillingly. "All right, I'll lay off. But I got a hunch about this man, Cavendish — I just don't like him at all."

They talked forcedly of other things through the rest of dinner, but, by the time they got to Harmony-land, Sally's ruffled feelings were somewhat soothed. In fact, when she went to bed that night, she admitted that Billy at times could be quite sweet. If he wasn't so crude he might ——

July came — August — and another proposal from Billy, an even more persistent one than usual, this time.

"Listen — I've got my chance! Are you listening to me, Sally? It's jewels," he gloated, "stolen jewels. Just like in a book." They were alone on a bench on Riverside Drive.

"Yes?" said Sally uninterestedly. She was thinking of Mr. Cavendish.

"The chief is wild. The whole department's up in the air. I can't tell you much about it — only a job as big as a whale's been put across. Our client's one of the biggest bugs in town — he's had the regular police on it, but they can't show a thing. There's a knockout of a reward. They know the crooks must be trying to get the stuff out of the country, but that's all they know." He whispered a name.

"Good Lord!" said Sally, impressed.

"Keep your face frozen tight about it, kid — don't breathe a word! Everybody in the office is after that reward; but it's my chance, my big chance,

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and I'm going to collect on it or end up smelling a lily!" He proceeded to more personal topics.

The next evening, as Sally was hurrying toward the subway, she suddenly found Mr. Cavendish at her elbow.

"Oh, Miss Bunch!" He was obviously surprised. "Hotter than ever, isn't it?"

She nodded; she felt too wilted to speak.

"You're on your way home?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Cavendish."

"The subway must be terrible these days."

"It's — it's very hot," said Sally briefly. She felt a little sick at the thought of the crowded train.

He hesitated. "Miss Bunch" — Sally winced; she hated her name — "I suppose you'd think it rather impertinent of me," he smiled, "but my car, as it happens — I always drive home from the office — do you live very far uptown?"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Cavendish, but I couldn't — I really couldn't."

He smiled again. "Why not? It isn't much to do. I assure you, it makes me feel like a brute, riding back in the open, while you —— Come, why not?"

"I couldn't," said Sally in a very feeble voice. "Besides, it's way up on One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street."

He looked at her sharply. "Nonsense! You're tired. Don't be silly. A breath of air will do you all the good in the world. And, besides — I'll confess — it isn't all altruism, Miss Bunch. I wanted to ask you something — a favor."

"Oh, *then* I'll accept," said Sally gratefully.

The smooth motion of the car — the cool air on her cheeks. She sighed with content, relaxing. They said very little until they were near Central Park, but even in what little he said Mr. Cavendish displayed a graceful formality that thrilled her.

"And now, Miss Bunch," he said, "If I might ask you ——"

"Another letter?" said Sally happily. "Oh, I'd be so charmed."

"Yes, another letter." Cavendish glanced about him. His voice sank. "About the same deal, to the same address. No answer. I'll pick you up in ten minutes at the subway station. Of course, you'll say nothing?"

"I'd die first," said Sally.

He laughed. "Oh, it won't require that. But you know how these business things are — everyone out to cut the next fellow's throat. Miss Bunch, I hate to impose on your good nature this way, but I know that I can trust you. If I were mistaken ——" For a moment his eyes were as blank and chilly as little hailstones. "And then we'll go for a spin in the Park," he ended.

"That would be just lovely, Mr. Cavendish," said Sally with fervor, as she took the letter. It had no address upon it, but she knew where to go.

The man at the desk regarded Mr. Cavendish distrustfully. The officers

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of the Continental Perfume Company were in conference behind locked doors.

The Continental Perfume Company was a blind; they were the fences of a criminal organization. The letters were written instructions to arrange for the selling of gems to foreign buyers.

"I don't like this business with the girl, Jim," said the man at the desk, "Miss Lunch, or whatever her name is. I don't like it at all."

"My dear man," said Mr. Cavendish in his elegant drawl, "trust me — trust me."

"We've darn well got to trust you — all of us," growled the man at the desk. "You know that, but I don't like it all the same."

"Well," said Mr. Cavendish wearily, "*I* can't go. You won't trust a regular messenger. You say they're watching all the rest of us. I know the girl, and she's the safest route we can try. Oh, don't be a fool, Red! Don't you see — it's my idea that ——"

"Oh, *I* see all right," said the other man with displeasure. "It's a good enough idea — you always have ideas, I'll hand that to you, Jim — but how about guarantees?"

"The best," said Mr. Cavendish. He smiled and picked an imaginary thread from his coat sleeve. "You know about men, my dear man. Leave the women to me."

Talks with Mr. Cavendish — little errands to do for Mr. Cavendish — once — incredible — dinner with Mr. Cavendish in a small French restaurant off Broadway. This episode Mr. Cavendish considered "venturesome."

And then the Saturday afternoon in the last week of August. It was hotter than ever, and nearly everyone in the Metal Products Building went off at noon. The big main doors were shut; the only open entrance was the Merrivale Street one, where a sleepy attendant dozed over a register intended to keep track of those who went in and out after hours. Few of the elevators were running; the girls took turns at staying in on Saturday afternoons. This afternoon it was Sally's turn to stay.

She was startled out of what had begun to be a waking doze by the sudden appearance of Billy Considine hurrying toward her, accompanied by two strangers in big, flat shoes.

"Take us up to your little friend Cavendish's outfit, Sally," he said with a magnificent air. "We've got the goods on him at last!"

"The goods?" said Sally, stupefied.

"The goods — all wool and a dozen yards crooked. Make it fast, kid — this is a pinch. All set down here, Mike?"

"All set," said one of the strangers.

"All right — let's go, Sally!"

The car shot upward. In the seconds of its flight to the eighth floor, Sally thought desperately fast. Billy and the stranger were talking together in absorbed, low voices. There must be some mistake. She must warn Cavendish.

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"Here you are!" she said, half sobbing. The car stopped, and she slammed open the doors. Billy and the stranger dashed out. Instantly she shut the doors behind them, and whirled her wheel. She had left them on the fourteenth floor — six floors above the Continental Perfume Company's offices. Even if they slid down the banisters, she would be able to warn Mr. Cavendish before they reached him.

At the eighth floor she clanged the doors open again. A cry of terror dried in her throat. Mr. Cavendish stood before her, and his right hand gripped a stubby blue automatic whose little black eye looked directly at her solar plexus.

"Oh, *Mr.* Cavendish!" she began reproachfully, but Mr. Cavendish seemed far too hurried to chat.

"Down!" Mr. Cavendish mouthed at her. "Down! Make it fast!" His mouth looked tight and cruel.

"Not the ground floor, you little fool! The basement — the basement!"

The elevator fell like a stone and stopped. Sally shot the doors back with incapable fingers. Emptiness — gray gloom.

"Thank Heaven!" said Mr. Cavendish, his revolver weaving in front of him. "Where's the door?"

"There's a way out around that pile of boxes," said Sally weakly. "To the right; but — oh, Mr. Cavendish ——"

"Keep your mouth shut, you poor little half-wit, or I'll plug you," said Mr. Cavendish impolitely.

A footfall — a heavy, solid, official footfall — sounded beyond the pile of boxes. Mr. Cavendish, rattled, was galvanized into furious activity. He leaped back into the elevator and slammed the doors. They shot upward.

A furious buzzing began in the elevator.

"That's the alarm," said Sally dully. "They're going to shut off the juice."

"Oh, Lord!" said Mr. Cavendish, sourly realizing his recent errors in judgment. "That breaks it. Well ——" He seemed suddenly in the grip of a brilliant idea. He dropped the revolver — fumbled horribly in his mouth for an instant, mumbling disjointed phrases. "Try it — nothing else to do — girl worships me — might have enough luck to get ——"

Suddenly, violently he was thrusting some object into Sally's hand — a moist, rough object, full of sharp projections.

"Hi' 'em!" he gurgled sharply at her. "Hi' 'em. Goo' girl! Doe nell. Never 'ell. Ee oo a-er."

The elevator shot down again toward the ground floor.

"'Op!" said Mr. Cavendish imperatively, and Sally stopped.

Half fainting, Sally opened the doors. Mr. Cavendish stepped out with dignity — into the arms of Billy Considine.

"Put 'em up!" said Billy.

Mr. Cavendish's arms rose slowly to the perpendicular. The stranger named Mike at once began an expert survey of Mr. Cavendish's pockets.

"Uh ih uh eaning uh is ex-or-ary

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er-or-ance?" began Mr. Cavendish. Billy laughed.

"Say, 'Ritzy Jim,' what's the matter with your talk machine?" he queried. "Run out of gas?"

"*Errr*," whirred Mr. Cavendish angrily and fell silent.

"No dope," said Mike disgruntledly.

Cavendish smiled. The infinitesimal pause that followed was broken by a scream from Sally. She had just looked down at the object that Mr. Cavendish had recently forced into her hand.

"His teeth!" she screamed hysterically. "He gave me his *teeth*."

She slumped toward the floor of the car. Mr. Cavendish saw his chance for freedom and took it — to be tackled by the second stranger before he had gone three steps. "Now will you be good?" said the stranger, sitting on his chest.

Sally, reviving in Billy's arms, opened her eyes and shut them at once.

"His teeth!" she moaned. "His horrible teeth! They're there! Oh, Billy, take them away!"

"All right, kid," said Billy, soothing her. "All right, darling. Say, Mike, did you — oh, hot cat!" For Mike, holding Mr. Cavendish's former teeth in one large hand, was slowly unscrewing a prominent molar from its plate. "Some filling!" he said and grinned.

A thin shell of enamel-like substance lay in his hand — a shell with a curious brilliant core that winked and glittered — a diamond.

"The sparklers," said Mike. "Now I'd say this fella had the most expensive false teeth in the world, wouldn't you, Bill?"

"*Am!*" said Mr. Cavendish violently from the floor.

Then they took him away.

Some weeks later, as Victorian romancers used to remark, a young man and a young woman might have been observed entering a large, official-looking building in downtown New York. The young woman wore a brand-new ring, and every time the young man looked at it he smiled

"It's a grand day, today, eh, Sally?" said Billy Considine.

"Billy, dear."

"And next month there'll be yet a grander," proceeded Billy.

"Now, Billy, we may not be married for months and months. You mustn't hurry ——"

"I'm not hurrying you — I'm just telling you," said Billy comfortably. "You're not going Cavendishing again, if I can help it, my dear, and you were nearly an accessory, if it hadn't ——"

"Oh, Billy, it was sweet of you to tell them that *I'd* helped you."

"You'll make a grand Mrs. Sherlock yet, Sally, my dear!"

"Floor, please?" said a weary elevator attendant. Sally started.

"Going up!" she began automatically, but Billy interrupted.

"Wherever they keep the marriage licenses, buddy!" he said, with a grin. "And make it snappy!"

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THE RAINBOW MURDERS END

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

THE room was in a cheap hotel, a few blocks from Market Street. The room had two windows, one of which faced the Bay. Jo Gar, his small body sprawled on the narrow bed, shivered a little. San Francisco was cold; he thought of the warm winds of Manila and the difference of the bays. He sighed and said softly to himself:

"Four more of the Rainbow diamonds — if I had them I could return to the Islands. I do not belong away from them —"

The telephone bell on the wall jangled; Jo Gar stared towards the apparatus for several seconds, then rose slowly. He was dressed in a gray suit that did not fit him too well, and his graying hair was mussed. He unhooked the receiver and said:

"Yes."

A pleasant voice said: "Inspector Raines, of the customs office. I have information for you."

Jo Gar said: "That is good — please come up."

He hung up the receiver and stood for several seconds looking towards the door. One of his three bags had been opened; the other two he had not unlocked. The *Cheyo Maru*, bringing him from Honolulu, had arrived three hours ago, and there had been much for the Island detective to do. In the doing of it he had gained little. Perhaps, he thought, Inspector Raines had done better.

He took from one of his few remaining packages a brown-paper cigarette, lighted it. His gray-blue eyes held a faint smile as he inhaled. Down the hall beyond the room there was the slam of the elevator's door, and footfalls. A man cleared his throat noisily. Jo Gar put his right hand in the pocket of his gray suit at his right side, went over and seated himself on the edge of the bed, facing the door. A knock sounded and the Philippine Island detective called flatly:

"Please — come in."

The door opened. A middle-aged man entered, dressed in a dark suit with a light coat thrown across his shoulders. The sleeves of the man's suit were not within the coat sleeves; it was worn as a cape. Raines had sharp features, pleasant blue eyes. His lips were thick; he was a big man. He said:

"Hello, Señor Gar."

Jo Gar rose and they shook hands. Raines' grip was loose and careless; he looked about the room, tossed a soft, gray hat on a chair. Jo Gar motioned towards the other chair in the room, and the inspector seated himself. He kept the coat slung across his shoulders.

Jo Gar said slowly, almost lazily:

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"Something was found?"

The inspector frowned and shook his head. He took from his pocket a small card. His picture was at one corner of the card, which was quite soiled. There was the printing of the Customs Department, some insignia that Gar merely glanced at, a stamped seal — and the statement that Albert Raines was a member of the San Francisco customs office.

Raines said: "The chief thought I'd better show you that right away, as we hadn't seen each other."

The Island detective smiled. "Thank you," he replied, and handed the card back. "Something was found?"

Raines shook his head. "Not a thing," he said. "We held her up for two hours, and we searched everything carefully. We even searched the child — and the child's baggage. We gave her a pretty careful questioning. For that matter — everybody on the boat got about three times the attention we usually give. And we didn't turn up a stone."

Jo Gar sighed. Raines said grimly: "If the diamonds were on that boat — they got past us. And that means you're in a tough spot, yes?"

The Island detective said: "I think that is very much — what it means."

Raines said in a more cheerful tone: "Well, the chief said you recovered six of the stones, between Manila and San Francisco — that's not at all bad."

Jo Gar smiled gently: "I was — extremely fortunate," he said. "But the woman in black — I had hopes that the four diamonds —"

Raines said quickly: "So had we. When we got your coded wire telling us that you suspected her of the murder of the man you recovered five stones from, but that you couldn't prove a thing against her, we figured we might be able to help. We weren't. But we did as you requested — when she left the dock we had a man follow her."

The Island detective said: "Good — she went to a hotel?"

Raines shook his head. "Don't suppose you've ever been out around the Cliff House, Señor Gar. It's a spot out on a bunch of jagged rocks, about an hour from town. A sort of amusement park has grown up around it. Seals fool around in the rocks and the tourists go for it strong. The woman took a cab, and our man took another. She went to the amusement park near the Cliff House."

Jo Gar's gray-blue eyes widened slightly.

"She spent more than three weeks on the *Cheyo Maru*," he breathed slowly. "And when she landed and had been cleared after an exhaustive customs examination, she went to an amusement park. Strange."

Raines made a grunting sound. "Damn' strange," he said. "Took all the baggage, which included a trunk we'd gone very carefully through. And the child."

Jo Gar narrowed his eyes and looked beyond the inspector. He said quietly: "In Manila we have an amusement

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park that is quite large. After entering the main gate there are many places one can go."

Raines nodded. "It's like that here. Only this park has several entrances, and you can drive through a section of it. The cab went in one entrance, stopped for a while near a merry-go-round — went out another. Then it went to a house and stopped. The luggage was taken inside, and the woman and child went in. Our man stayed around a short time, but nothing else happened."

The Island detective said: "You have the address?"

Raines nodded. He took from his pocket a small slip of paper, on which were scrawled some words, handed it to Jo Gar.

The Island detective read: "One hundred and forty-one West Pacific Avenue."

Raines nodded. "That's it — Cary said it was a frame house, set back a short distance from the road. The section isn't much built up out there."

Jo Gar nodded. "It is very good of you to bring me this information," he stated.

Raines made a swift gesture with both hands. "That's all right," he said. "Cary has another job just now, or he'd have come along to tell you about it. Looks queer to me."

The Island detective spoke slowly. "It is not *necessary* to drive through the amusement park, in order to reach this address?" he asked.

Raines said: "Hell, no — that's what seems funny. That woman was trying to hide where she was going. Maybe she figured she *might* be followed."

Jo Gar nodded. "I think you are right," he said.

Raines got to his feet, held out his right hand.

"Sorry the office couldn't get something on her at the pier," he apologized. "But you know where she is — and you know she acted funny getting there."

Jo Gar smiled and shook the inspector's hand. He sat down on the bed again as Raines took his hat. When Raines reached the door, he said:

"Luck on those other four." He grinned and went out. Going along the corridor he whistled. The elevator door slammed.

Jo Gar got to his feet with remarkable speed for him. He got his coat and hat, was out of the room quickly. He used the stairs instead of the elevator. When he reached the small lobby he saw Raines light a cigar, go outside and raise a hand. A cab pulled close to the curb. When it started away the Island detective hailed another, parked some feet from the hotel entrance. He said to the driver:

"Follow that machine, please — but do not move too close to it. When it halts, halt some distance away."

The driver looked at Jo curiously, but nodded his head. The two cabs moved from one street to another. There was a great deal of traffic, but Jo's driver was skillful. For perhaps ten minutes the two cabs moved through the city, apparently keeping

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in the heart of it. Finally the leading cab curved close to a building that had a large clock set in granite stone. It halted. Unfamiliar as Jo was with San Francisco, he recognized the building as a railroad station of considerable importance. There were many porters about, and cabs were everywhere.

As his own cab pulled close to the curb Jo watched Raines alight and pay his driver. The inspector hurried into the station, and when he was out of sight Jo paid up and left his cab. He pulled his hat low over his eyes, straightened his small body a little, went into the station. Almost instantly he saw Raines. The man was at a luggage checking counter; as Jo watched from a safe distance he saw Raines handed two large-sized valises. A porter picked them up; Raines gestured towards another clock inside the station and said something. The porter hurried away, followed by the inspector.

Jo Gar followed, being careful not to be seen. When Raines and his porter went through a train gate, the Island detective halted near it, a peculiar smile on his face. After a few minutes the colored porter came back through the gate. Jo beckoned to him.

"The gentleman whose luggage you just carried to the train — I think he was a friend of mine. You saw his ticket?"

The porter shook his head slowly: "He tol' me his car and seat number — didn't show no ticket," he replied.

Jo Gar frowned. "How did you know what train to take him to?" he asked slowly.

The porter grinned. "That's right," he said. "He wanted the Chicago train."

The Island detective drew a sharp breath. He handed the porter a quarter, walked slowly back into the station's waiting room.

"Mr. Raines had barely time to make his train," he breathed softly. "Yet he was very kind to me — and said nothing about leaving on such a journey."

He took a cab back to his hotel, found everything in his room in perfect order. He called the customs office and after considerable inquiry was told that Inspector Raines had left for his hotel some hour or so ago. He said:

"Yes, he has been here. I wondered if he had returned."

There was a pause, questions were asked at the other end, and he was informed that Raines was not expected to return for special night work, but that he would be on duty in the morning. Jo Gar thanked his informant and hung up the receiver.

He sat on the edge of the small bed and watched a light sign flash in the distance. A ferry boat was a glow of moving light, on the Bay waters. The air seemed very cold. Jo Gar decided that the real Inspector Raines had met with injuries, and that a certain person had impersonated him, had told him an untrue story about a certain woman in black — and had then departed from the city of San Francisco.

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He decided that he was expected to go to the house at One hundred and forty-one, West Pacific Avenue, that he was supposed to believe the woman had acted suspiciously in going there.

He said softly and slowly: "I have the six diamonds — they have the four. I am in a strange city, and a card with a seal on it was expected to make a great impression. But one man's picture can replace another's — very easily —"

He rose and looked at his wrist-watch. It was almost eight o'clock. He inspected his Colt automatic, slipped it back into a pocket of his coat. The phone bell rang, and when he lifted the receiver and gave his name he was told that the customs office was calling, and that Inspector Raines had been found unconscious in an alley not far from the piers. He was still unconscious and it was not certain that he would live. He had apparently been struck over the head with a blunt instrument. The customs office felt that Señor Gar should know why he had failed to arrive, and also that all passengers on the *Cheyo Maru* had been passed through the office. One had been followed as requested, but her cab had been lost in traffic. The office was very sorry.

Jo Gar said: "I am very sorry to hear of Inspector Raines' injuries. I will call at the office tomorrow. Thank you for calling."

He hung up the receiver, went to the window that faced the Bay and the distant, lighted ferry boat. His gray-blue eyes were smiling coldly. He thought: They did *not* expect Inspector Raines to be found so soon. They *did* expect me to go immediately to the address the imposter gave me. They might easily have escaped with the four diamonds, but they chose to lead me to them. They wish the six in my possession, being very greedy. But I am warned, directly and indirectly.

The Island detective turned away from the window and moved towards the room door. He breathed very softly:

"Just the same — I shall go directly to the address given me."

Jo Gar left his cab a square from One hundred and forty-one West Pacific Avenue. He had picked the driver with care; the man was husky in build and young. He had a good chin and clear eyes, and he said his name was O'Halohan. Somewhere in the Islands Jo had read that the Irish were fighters.

He said now: "I am a detective — and I'm going inside of the house at One hundred and forty-one. Here is a ten dollar bill. In about five minutes I want you to drive to the front of the house and blow your horn twice. After that just stay in your seat. Wait about ten minutes — than blow your horn again, twice. If I do not come to a window or the door, and call to you — go to the police and tell them I went into the house and was prevented from coming out. That is all — is it clear?"

The driver nodded. "I got a gun,"

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he said. "And a permit to carry it. Suppose, after the second time I blow my horn, you don't show. Why not let me come in and *get* you out?"

The Island detective smiled narrowly. "You are young and strong, but neither of those qualities might be of too great value. Neither of us might come out."

The driver said: "If it looks that bad — what you goin' in alone for?"

Jo Gar continued to smile. He said patiently:

"I have an idea it will be better that way. You must follow my instructions."

The driver nodded. "You're doing the job," he muttered. "I'll be down there in five minutes, and make the horn racket. I'll give it to you again in ten. Then if you don't show I'll head for the police."

The Island detective nodded. "That is the way," he said. "Don't get out of the car."

The driver said: "Supposing I hear you yelling for help — I still stick inside?"

Jo said grimly: "You will not hear me calling for help, Mister O'Halohan. My visit is not at all complicated. After you blow your horn twice — the second time, I will either give you instructions, or you will go for the police."

The driver said: "You win."

Jo Gar half closed his almond-shaped eyes. "It may be very important to me — that you do just as I have instructed. You are sure you understand?"

The driver nodded; his eyes met Jo Gar's squarely.

"It ain't anything tough," he stated.

Jo Gar spoke very quietly. "It is extremely simple."

He half turned away from the cab, and heard the driver say harshly:

"Yeah — if it works."

The Island detective moved along the broken pavement of the sidewalk, a thin smile on his browned face.

"It will be just as simple," he said in a low tone, a half-whisper, "if it *doesn't* work. But much more final — for me."

Number One hundred and forty-one was a rambling one story house in not too good condition. There were no street lights near it; tall trees rose on either side. The nearest house to it was almost a square distant; opposite was a lot filled with low brush. The section was quiet and pretty well deserted, but less than a half mile away there was the flare of colored lights in the sky. And at intervals Jo Gar could hear distant and faint staccato sounds — the noise of shooting gallery rifles.

He did not hesitate as he reached the front of the house. A yellowish light showed faintly beyond one of the side windows. The pavement that ran to a few steps was broken and not level.

Out of the corners of his gray-blue eyes, as he moved towards the steps, Jo saw that the lights of the cab had

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been dimmed — their color did not show on the street in front of the place. A cold wind made sound in the trees as he reached the steps, moved up them. His right hand was in the right pocket of his coat, gripping the butt of the automatic.

He stood for a few seconds, his eyes on the number plate, which seemed new and had been placed in a position easily seen. The house was old, the section of San Francisco was not too good — but the number plate was in excellent condition.

The Island detective's lips curved just a little. But the smile that showed momentarily on his face was not a pleasant one. He had a definite feeling that this house marked the end of the trail. He thought of the ones who had died in Manila, when Delgada's jewelry store had been robbed — he thought of the men who had died since then. A vision of Juan Arragon's brown face flashed before his eyes.

He touched the index finger of his left hand to a button near the number plate, heard no sound within the house. One hand at his side, the other in his right pocket — he stood in the cold wind and waited. He had come to this house, but he had not been tricked. He was gambling — gambling his life, in a strange country, against his chances of recovering the four missing Von Loffler diamonds, against the final chance of facing the one who had planned the Manila crime.

He could not be positive of anything, but he sensed these things. This was to be the finish, one way or the other. He would return to Manila — or he would never leave this house alive. He felt it, and he was suddenly very calm. From somewhere within he heard footfalls; there was the sound of a bolt being moved, the door opened very wide.

Jo Gar looked into the eyes of a man who had a smiling face. It was a thin, browned face, and the eyes were small and colorless. The man was dressed in a brown suit, almost the color of his skin. There was nothing striking about the one who had opened the door, unless it was the smallness of his colorless eyes.

The eyes looked beyond the Island detective, to the sidewalk and road. The man moved his head slightly and Jo Gar said:

"I am Señor Gar, a private detective who arrived only today in San Francisco. I arrived on the *Cheyo Maru* — and have come here in search of a woman who was on that boat. She had with her a child —"

He stopped and looked downward at the dull color of black that was the metal of the gun held by the man in the doorway. The man had made only a slight movement with his right hand; the gun's muzzle was less than three feet from Jo's body.

Jo Gar smiled into the smiling eyes of the one in the doorway.

"I have made a mistake?" he asked very quietly.

The one in the doorway shook his head. "On the contrary," he said in a voice that was very low and cold,

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"you have come to the correct place. I have been — expecting you."

He stepped to one side, and Jo Gar walked into a wide hall. The light was dim, and though there were electric bulbs about, it was furnished by a lamp whose wick was uneven. The place was very cold. It had the air of not having been lived in for a long time, and there was no evidence about showing that it would be lived in.

The thin-faced man said: "The first room on your right, please. Lift your hands slightly."

Jo Gar raised his hands slightly, went through a narrow doorway into a room that seemed even colder than the hall. The light in the room was better — there were two lamps. Blinds were drawn tightly. Beside a small table was a stool that might have been made for a piano.

The one with the gun said in the same, cold voice:

"Sit on the stool, Gar — put your hands on the table. Keep them there."

Hatred crept into his voice as he uttered the last three words. Jo Gar did as instructed. He said quietly:

"I knew that the man you sent to me at my hotel lied. I followed him to the station, and watched him leave the city. I returned to the hotel and the customs office informed me that one of their men, who was coming to me with information of no great importance, had been knocked unconscious. I knew then how the card presented me had been obtained, and that I was expected to believe a story that pointed to suspicious action by a woman I was interested in — and that I was expected to come to this address."

There was hatred showing in the small, colorless eyes of the thin-faced one. He stood almost ten feet away from Jo Gar, facing him.

"But you came, knowing all this."

Jo Gar smiled a little. "When you made that movement and held that gun on me — my fingers were on the trigger of my own gun. I could have shot you down — I did not."

There was a flicker of expression in the standing one's eyes. He said:

"You are very kind, Señor Gar."

Mockery and hatred was in his tone. Jo Gar said slowly:

"No — not kind. I have six diamonds that you would like. I think that you have four I would like. You wanted me here to bargain with me. You wanted me here so that you could trap me, then offer me my life for the six diamonds. You have worked that way, with your accomplices, since the robbery was effected."

The thin-faced one smiled and showed white, even teeth.

"You would risk your life and six diamonds — for the four you say I have?"

Jo Gar smiled gently. "My life is not too important," he said. "I have never regarded it that way. I came here because I knew the one responsible for many deaths would be here."

The thin-faced one said mockingly: "And you were not trapped? You simply wanted to see that person

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whom you hated because of Arragon's death, and because of things done to you?"

The Island detective kept his hands motionless on the table surface. He shook his head.

"No," he replied. "Not exactly. I wanted to see that one taken by the police. And that is practically assured, now."

He watched the facial muscles of the thin-faced one jerk, saw his colorless eyes shift towards the blinds of the windows. His gun hand moved a little, in towards his body. Rage twisted his face, and then he smiled. It was a grotesque, mask-like smile. The brown skin was drawn tightly over the face bones and the lips were pressed together. Jo Gar said:

"I remember you, Raaker. You were in the insurance business in Manila until a few years ago. There was about to be a prosecution, and you left the Islands."

The thin-faced one said with hoarseness in his voice:

"And I have never forgotten you, Señor Gar. You tell me you have come here, not caring about your life — and that the police are outside. Well — I didn't bring you here to get your six diamonds, Gar — Von Loffler's diamonds. I brought you here because I hate you. I want to watch your body squirm on the floor, beside that stool."

Jo Gar said quietly: "That was how you knew about the Von Loffler diamonds — that Dutch Insurance Company. You stayed out of Manila, Raaker — you couldn't risk coming back. You hired men. Some of them tricked you — and each other. The robbery was successful, but you lost slowly. All the way back from Manila, Raaker, you lost. You used men and women, and they tried to kill me — too many times. They were killed — there were many deaths. Those were diamonds of death, Raaker — and you only got four of them. The woman in black brought them to you — I think she was the only one who was faithful."

Raaker was breathing heavily. He made a sudden movement with his left hand, plunging it into a pocket. When it came out four stones spilled to the surface of the small table. Three of them only rolled a few inches, but one struck against a finger of the Island detective's left hand. Raaker said fiercely:

"I hate you, Gar. You drove me from the Islands, with your evidence. I hated Von Loffler, too. He took all his properties away from me, because he learned that I was gambling, because he was afraid of the insurance. So I learned about the stones, where they were. And I planned the robbery. I stayed here — and got reports. I tried to direct. But you were on that boat —"

He broke off, shrugged. "You are going to die, Gar. So I can talk. The woman came to me with the diamonds. Four of them. And by the time she brought them to me here — she hated me. She had seen too much death. She's gone away, with her child — and you'll never find her,

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Gar. She killed a man on the *Cheyo Maru*, and that made her hate me all the more. She had to kill him, before he could talk — to you!"

Jo Gar said steadily: "I don't think — I *want* to find her, Raaker. I know now who planned the crime, who caused the deaths. And you are caught, Raaker —"

There was the sound of brakes beyond the room, the low beat of an idling engine. Two sharp blasts from a horn came into the room. Raaker jerked his head sharply, then turned his eyes towards Jo Gar again. The Island detective made no movement. He smiled with his lips pressed together. Raaker said:

"What's — that?"

His voice was hoarse. Jo Gar parted his lips. He said:

"A signal from the police — that the house is properly covered."

Raaker sucked in a deep breath. "I'll get more than one of them — as they come in!" he muttered.

Jo Gar shook his head. "I do not think you will, Raaker. They will not come in. It is easier to wait for *you* — to go *out*."

Raaker smiled twistedly, but there was fear in his eyes.

"They'll come in, all right," he breathed. "I'll get you first — when they come. *You* won't see them come in, Gar."

Jo Gar smiled. "They will not come in," he said softly. "If I do not go out, within the next ten minutes, they will unload the sub-machine-guns and the smoke bombs. They will know I am dead — and that there is a killer in the house. The smoke bombs — and the tear gas bombs — *they* will come in."

Raaker said hoarsely. "——! How I hate you, you little half-breed —"

He jerked the gun slightly. The Island detective looked him in the eyes, still smiling.

"That is true," he said. "You *do* hate me — and there *is* the blood of the Spanish and the Filipino in my veins. But I am not a criminal — a thief and a killer."

Raaker turned his head slightly and listened to the steady beat of the cab engine. Then his eyes came back to the small figure of Gar, went to the four glittering diamonds on the table. He said thickly:

"With the others — over two hundred thousand dollars — I would have been fixed —"

He raised his gun arm slowly. From the cab outside there came the sharp sound of a horn, silence — and then another blast.

Jo Gar never took his eyes from the eyes of Raaker.

He said very slowly: "Machine-gun bullets, Raaker. And choking, blinding gas. They'll be waiting for *you* — after you get through squeezing that trigger."

Raaker cried out in a shrill tone: "Damn you — Gar — that won't help *you* any —"

There was a sudden engine hum as the cab driver accelerated the motor. Yellow light flashed beyond the house, along the road. O'Halohan was going

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for the police, starting his cab. For a second Raaker twisted his head towards the sound and the light. He was thinking of machine-guns — and tear gas —

Jo Gar was on his feet in a flash. The table went forward, over. The Island detective leaped to the right as Raaker cried out hoarsely, and the first bullet from his gun crashed into the table wood.

The second bullet from the gun ripped cloth of Gar's coat, and his right hand was coming up, with the Colt in it, when the cloth ripped. He squeezed the trigger sharply but steadily. There was the third gun crash and Raaker screamed, took a step forward. His gun hand dropped, he went to his knees, stared at Gar for a second, swaying — then fell heavily to the floor.

Jo Gar went slowly to his side. He was dead — the bullet had caught him just above the heart. One diamond lay very close to his curved fingers; it was as though he were grasping for it, in death.

The other three Jo found after a five-minute search. Then he went from the room into the hall, and out of the house. The cab was out of sight; in the distance there was still colored light in the sky. The shooting gallery noise came at intervals. Jo Gar found a package in his pocket, lighted one of his brown-paper cigarettes.

He said very softly, to himself: "I have all — all the Rainbow diamonds. Now I can go home, after the police come. I hope my friend Juan Arragon — knows."

He stood very motionless on the top step that led to the small porch, and waited for the police to come. And he thought, as he waited, of the Philippines — of Manila — and of his tiny office off the *Escolta*. It was good to forget other things, and to think of his returning.

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these spine-tingling mystery thrillers are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "Relative to Poison," by E. C. R. Lorac. "Expert plotting, vital characters . . . urbane writing," reports the *Saturday Review of Literature.*

BESTSELLER MYSTERY — "Bullets for a Blonde" (formerly "Departure Delayed"), by Will Oursler. Abridged edition. "High grade thriller," says the *Saturday Review of Literature.*

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "The Continental Op," by Dashiell Hammett, ". . . without question one of the great writers of mystery fiction."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Mary Adams Sarett's "Subject to Review" is one of the eleven "first stories" which won special awards in last year's contest. It is an unusual story, told in documentary style, and although restrained in tone and deliberately mannered, has the impact of a real-life case history.

Mrs. Sarett majored in writing at Sarah Lawrence College and has been writing off and on since her graduation. In the last five years she has written what she describes as "an exceptionally bad novel" (we wonder), a number of plays which pleased only herself — and, in general, "bit off more than [she] could chew." More recently, she tried her hand at short stories, but while these received encouragement, she did not actually sell one until EQMM offered to buy "Subject to Review."

Yes, Mrs. Sarett's first story is unusual — for who thinks of murder in the midst of battle? Who thinks of the murder of an individual while mass murder is the order of the day? Gilbert K. Chesterton once wrote a story in which he asked: "Where would a wise man hide a leaf?" And he answered: "In the forest." And then GKC proceeded to have a man murdered on a battlefield — how better conceal a dead body than to surround it with many dead bodies? But Mrs. Sarett's conception of murder on a battlefield is altogether different, and stems from far more realistic sources.

"Subject to Review" was inspired by newspaper accounts of just such tragedies as Mrs. Sarett has woven into her first story. True, the newspaper accounts were always vague and curiously incomplete, leaving plenty of room for a writer's imagination. Once committed to her theme, however, Mrs. Sarett found that she had to bolster her imagination with considerable research; she studied official procedure and cross-examined many people whose war experiences were more intimate than hers and whose memories were still vivid and, in some instances, partially recorded. And Mrs. Sarett did her research well: the stamp of authenticity shines through her tale of a military murder investigation.

POSTSCRIPT: *Long after we had awarded a special prize to Mrs. Sarett's first story, and after we had already purchased the tale for EQMM, it occurred to us that there was something strangely familiar about the author's surname. "Sarett" is an uncommon name, and then we realized that it reminded us of Lew Sarett, the well-known poet, and winner of many Poetry Prizes. We dropped a note of inquiry to Mrs. Sarett, and she replied that she is Lew Sarett's daughter-in-law. "Mr. Sarett," she went on, "has been a great inspiration to me, both as a person and as a poet" — which illustrates again the inextricable relationship between poetry and ratiocination.*

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SUBJECT TO REVIEW

by MARY ADAMS SARETT

1412 Lukens Blvd.
Oakland, Calif.
April 10, 1945

Corporal Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx
APO #xx, c/o Postmaster
San Francisco
Bob darling —

I know it's been some time since I've written, but don't think I've forgotten you, dear. I must think of you every day a thousand times — everything I do alone makes me think of all the things we used to do together.

Your letters sound so discouraged. Darling, the war can't last forever. Your mother and I are so glad you and Lee Graham are in the same outfit. Maybe you know I never liked Lee much, but of course it means a lot to you to have your best friend with you — and maybe the war will make more of a man of him. It does seem unjust, though, that he should be your superior officer.

We're all terribly busy here. The children miss you dreadfully and they're hard for me to handle alone. Your mother *will* interfere. I don't know what she writes you, but I can't help feeling from your letters that she tries to turn you against me. I think she's a little jealous and always has been. We mustn't let her come between us, Bob!

I have to stop now, but will write again tomorrow.

Remember, darling, I love you more than anything in the world —

Verne

April 29, 1945

Corporal Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx
APO #xx, c/o Postmaster
Darling —

Your letters worry me so. I know you're going through hell, and I try not to think of anything but how wonderful it will be when you come home. You know, I never doubt for a second that everything will turn out all right for us. But, dear, *be careful.*

You can imagine my reaction to that mission! I hate to say this about Lee, but it seems to me he could have sent someone else — or gone himself. After all, he has no family dependent on him. Well, thank God you got back safely!

Speaking of dependents, I'm afraid I'm having a little trouble making ends meet. Prices are simply *fantastic* and the children are growing out of their clothes every other day. I do try to manage, but I just can't seem to make things go around on what you send home. I know you'll hate the idea of touching our savings, Bob, but I honestly don't see anything else to do. What do you think?

Please, darling, don't listen to the things your mother says against me! You're very gullible, you know —

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though I suppose it's one of the things I love about you, the way you see good in people. But after all, Bob, I *am* your *wife*, and you must trust me. Just because we're different kinds of people, she imagines things about me. I can't so much as go to the movies without making her suspicious, and of course she can't begin to understand why everything costs so much more now.

Write me as often as you can, dear, and please give what I've said about the money some serious thought.

All my love,

Verne

May 15, 1945

Corporal Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx
APO #xx c/o Postmaster

Bob darling —

You don't know what it does to me to hear what you're going through, and not be able to do anything to help! I look at your picture for a long time every night, and you look so young — it's hard to imagine that this awful war could separate us. The one of you in uniform looks so determined — and helpless, somehow — but I know how brave you are, and I'm terribly proud.

Please try not to worry about things, Bob. The children and I will manage somehow. And you *simply mustn't* believe your mother. When you get home, the three of us can talk everything over, but the important thing is for you not to worry.

Sometimes I feel that if the war doesn't end soon, we'll all go out of our minds. I thought I might try to go spend a few days with my family and leave the children here with your mother — the change would do everybody good. But we just can't afford it. I went down to the bank today to ask about taking some money from our savings account, but they said I must have your permission in writing. Darling, I hate to add to your troubles, but we have to have money *right away* or I don't know what will become of us. Your mother doesn't seem to understand, but I know you wouldn't sacrifice the children's health even if it seemed to threaten our security as you say in your letter. Please, dear, write the bank *immediately*.

It's sweet of you to share my letters with Lee. Mrs. Graham says she writes him every day, but she's such an hysterical woman it might be better if she didn't. She worries so it puts us all on edge and it must upset him, too. That's probably what makes him act so strangely. War does funny things to people — things they aren't really responsible for.

Take care of yourself, darling, and pray the war ends soon.

All my love,

Verne

May 30, 1945

Corporal Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx
APO #xx, c/o Postmaster

Dear Bob —

I'm in a great hurry, so this will just be a note. The bank tells me you still haven't written about the money. It hardly seems possible that you are

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doing this deliberately, but knowing the way your mother feels about me and the lies she tells you, I suppose I might have expected it. Things are getting desperate, Bob. And it breaks my heart to think you don't trust me or care enough about me to do something about it. I never would have believed you were stingy or cruel — or even just indifferent — but you leave me no choice in thinking that now!

I still love you —

Verne

* * *

Sept. 8, 1945

Corporal Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx
APO #xx, c/o Postmaster
My dearest boy —

The whole world seems to have gone mad since this awful war. Lee Graham's death was a terrible shock to us all, but that you should be held responsible is the most horrible thing of all! The army must be insane to accuse you of a thing like that. What dreadful mistake has been made?

I wrote to the President of the United States the minute I got your letter — I know he'll see what's right and take action. Bob, dear, write me all the details of what happened and I'll move heaven and earth to help you. A great country like this will surely not stand for such a travesty of justice! My dearest son, have courage.

Verne left a few days ago to go visit her family and I haven't been able to get in touch with her yet to tell her of this tragic business. No, the bank didn't give her the money. She's so extravagant, I think you acted wisely. Of course all our little misunderstandings seem insignificant now—

Don't give up hope, son. God will hear our prayers and not fail us!

Mother

* * *

SUBJECT: The case of Cpl. Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx
TO: Secretary of War
Attached is the case of Cpl. Robert Chandler charged with murder under the 86th Article of War and sentenced to death subject to your approval.
In view of the publicity accorded this case, I am bringing to your attention a possible mitigating circumstance: i.e., insufficient proof of motive.

X. X. Xxxxxxxx
Major General
Judge Advocate General

20 Sept 45

SUBJECT: The case of Cpl. Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx
TO: The President of the United States
Attached is a transcript of pertinent excerpts from the trial of Corporal Robert Chandler as per your request.

Xxxxxxx X. Xxxxxxxxx
Secretary of War

22 Sept 45

Enclosure:
On 10 Sept 45 at 1000, the court was called to order for the purpose of trying Cpl. Robert Chandler for the murder of Lt. Lee Graham, under the 86th Article of War. Members of the court were (names omitted for brevity). The Trial Judge Advocate, the

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Defense Counsel, and their assistants being sworn in . . . the Trial Judge Advocate swore in the court.

President of the Court: The Trial Judge Advocate will read the charges.

TJA: . . . Cpl. Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx is hereby charged with the murder of Lt. Lee Graham O-xxxxxxx. On 6 June 45, when the platoon of which he was a member was engaged in a fire fight with the Japanese troops at Xxxxx Ridge on the island of Okinawa, Cpl. Chandler deliberately aimed his M-1 rifle, and fired two shots into the head of Lt. Graham, who was directing his platoon at a position approximately ten yards ahead of Cpl. Chandler. Cpl. Chandler's act was both deliberate and wilful.

President: Has the Defense Counsel any opening remarks?

Defense Counsel: I have not.

President: The TJA will proceed with his case.

TJA: I call as my first witness Sgt. William Dunn.

(*Sgt. William Dunn 3xxxxxxx was seated, sworn in, and gave his name, serial number, and unit in prescribed fashion*)

TJA: Sgt. Dunn, where were you on the morning of June 6th, 1945?

Sgt. Dunn: Sir, I was somewhere on top of Xxxxx Ridge.

TJA: And what were you doing?

Sgt. Dunn: Well, sir, we spent most of the morning fighting with the Japs.

TJA: Did anything unusual occur that morning?

Sgt. Dunn: Well, yes, sir. At one time when we were engaged in a fire fight with the Nips, Cpl. Chandler here picks up his gun and shoots two shots right into Lt. Graham's head.

TJA: What did you do then?

Sgt. Dunn: Well, sir, as it happened, a lot of us had been knocked out, and when Cpl. Chandler killed Lt. Graham . . .

Defense Counsel: Objection. It has not yet been proven that Cpl. Chandler killed Lt. Graham. It is only an opinion of the witness. I want his last remarks stricken from the records.

TJA: Sir, the witness is testifying on actual facts, not on opinions.

President: Objection overruled. The witness will continue.

Sgt. Dunn: Well, I went up and tried to help Lt. Graham, but he was dead; so I took over command of the platoon as I was the second in command.

TJA: What did you do then?

Sgt. Dunn: I figured something must be wrong with Chandler. You know people go off their rockers sometimes when things get hot and it was plenty hot up there; so I ordered him back to the aid station.

TJA: Did he go?

Sgt. Dunn: Yes, sir. Sure, he went right back.

TJA: That's all I have.

President: Has the defense counsel any questions?

Defense Counsel: Yes. Sergeant, you say things were quite hot up there.

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Now tell me, do you have much time to look around when you're in the middle of a fire fight and see what other people are doing?

TJA: Objection. The defense counsel is trying to imply that Sgt. Dunn. wasn't doing his job and thus incriminate him.

Defense Counsel: If it would please the court, I am merely trying to show that in a battle it's hard to determine who is shooting at whom.

President (*after conferring with legal member*): Objection overruled. Proceed.

Defense Counsel: Now, Sergeant, will you tell me how you could tell in the middle of a battle whether Cpl. Chandler was shooting at Lt. Graham or shooting at the enemy?

Sgt. Dunn: Well, sir, as second in command of the platoon I was helping Lt. Graham, and we were just trying to find out how many men were left and I was checking up when I saw Cpl. Chandler shoot Lt. Graham.

Defense Counsel: And was there any of the enemy standing near or in front of Lt. Graham at that time?

Sgt. Dunn: No, sir. That's why it surprised me so.

Defense Counsel: One more question, Sergeant. When you sent Cpl. Chandler back to the aid station, did he seem upset or at all like combat fatigue cases you have seen?

Sgt. Dunn: No, sir.

Defense Counsel: The defense has no further questions.

President: Any rebuttal?

TJA: No, sir. As my next witness, I call Pfc. Wilfred Glickman.

(*Pfc. Wilfred M. Glickman 3xxxxxxx was seated and sworn in, and gave his name, serial number, and unit in prescribed fashion*)

TJA: Glickman, did you see Cpl. Chandler under any special circumstances on June 6th last?

Pfc. Glickman: Yes, sir.

TJA: Under what circumstances?

Pfc. Glickman: I saw him shoot Lt. Graham, sir.

TJA: Will you please describe the incident in your own words?

Pfc. Glickman: Well, about twenty or thirty Nips had just launched a counter-attack against our position. There was a lot of shooting going on and Lt. Graham was up in front trying to organize things. Cpl. Chandler was about ten yards behind him, and, well, he just took his rifle and plugged him twice in the head.

TJA: Now, Glickman, perhaps the Defense Counsel would like to know how you happened to be looking at Cpl. Chandler.

Pfc. Glickman: Well, sir, I was a messenger for Lt. Graham and I had a message for Cpl. Chandler which I was to tell him.

TJA: And what was that message?

Pfc. Glickman: He was to take a squad and try and divert the enemy from one flank.

TJA: Isn't that rather dangerous?

Pfc. Glickman: I wouldn't like to be doing it.

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TJA: No further questions.

President: Has the defense any questions?

Defense Counsel: Yes, sir. Glickman, did you give that message to Cpl. Chandler before or after the time you said he shot Lt. Graham?

Pfc. Glickman: I never got a chance to give him the message, sir.

Defense Counsel: You mean he never was actually told by you about this order?

Pfc. Glickman: That is right, sir.

Defense Counsel: No further questions.

President: The TJA will call his next witness.

TJA: My next witness is Capt. Wesley Lane, the battalion surgeon.

(*Capt. Wesley M. Lane O-xxxxxx was seated and sworn in and gave his name, serial number, and unit in prescribed fashion*)

TJA: Capt. Lane, did you see Cpl. Chandler on last June the 6th?

Capt. Lane: Yes. He reported into my aid station in the late morning, and said he had been sent back for combat fatigue.

TJA: What did you do?

Capt. Lane: I examined him and sent him back to the Station Hospital.

TJA: In your opinion, what was his condition?

Defense Counsel: Objection. Unless Capt. Lane can show he is a qualified psychiatrist, he has no right to give an opinion on a man's mental condition.

President: Objection sustained.

TJA: No further questions.

President: Any questions, Defense Counsel?

Defense Counsel: No, sir.

(*The witness was excused and Maj. Anthony Bertelli O-xxxxxx was called to the stand, seated and sworn in. He gave his name, serial number, and unit in prescribed fashion*)

TJA: Maj. Bertelli, what is your position with the XXth Station Hospital?

Maj. Bertelli: I am the psychiatrist.

TJA: Have you ever had occasion to examine the defendant, Cpl. Robert Chandler?

Maj. Bertelli: Yes. He was brought in the afternoon of the 6th of June as a combat fatigue case.

TJA: And what was your diagnosis?

Maj. Bertelli: The man was perfectly normal.

TJA: Could he have been a combat fatigue case a few hours before?

Maj. Bertelli: I would say not. If that had been the case, he would still have shown some of the effects.

TJA: Do other people come in that claim to be combat fatigue cases and are not?

Maj. Bertelli: Yes. I've had quite a bit of experience with these cases.

TJA: No further questions.

President: Defense Counsel?

Defense Counsel: Yes, sir. Maj. Bertelli, where did you get the experience which qualifies you as a psychiatrist?

Maj. Bertelli: I was a psychiatrist at the Medical Center in New York for twelve years.

Defense Counsel: How, Major, are

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you able to remember this man and what day he came into your hospital?

Maj. Bertelli: We keep records of all incoming patients.

Defense Counsel: Couldn't some other man come in and give Cpl. Chandler's name?

Maj. Bertelli: No. In this type of case we check the man's dog tags.

Defense Counsel: That's all.

TJA: I have one more question. Maj. Bertelli, is it not true that your testimony in previous court-martial cases has been used in determining whether a man is really mentally ill or whether he is a malingerer?

Maj. Bertelli: That is correct.

TJA: Maj. Bertelli is our last witness. We rest our case.

President: The defense will proceed with its case.

Defense Counsel: As its first witness, the Defense will call Capt. Mark Brown, the company commander of the defendant.

(*Capt. Mark Brown O-xxxxxx was seated and sworn in and gave his name, serial number, and unit in prescribed fashion*)

Defense Counsel: Capt. Brown, are you acquainted with the defendant?

Capt. Brown: I am, sir.

Defense Counsel: What is your personal opinion of Cpl. Chandler?

Capt. Brown: Sir, I would rate him one of the best soldiers in my company. He was alert and obedient; he was very courageous. He carried out orders effectively and promptly.

Defense Counsel: Do you know of any reason he would have to kill Lt. Graham?

Capt. Brown: No, sir.

Defense Counsel: Do you think he killed Lt. Graham?

TJA: Objection. The witness's statement would be just one of opinion, not of fact.

President: Objection sustained.

Defense Counsel: I have no further questions.

TJA: I have a question. Capt. Brown, is it not true that you signed the charges against this man?

Capt. Brown: Yes, sir.

TJA: Why did you do that?

Capt. Brown: It was my duty as company commander to report these matters that had been brought to my attention.

TJA: That is all.

President: If there are no further questions, the witness may be excused. Defense Counsel, have you any other witnesses?

Defense Counsel: Yes, sir, I have one other witness, Cpl. Joseph Bragan.

(*Cpl. Joseph Bragan 3xxxxxxx was called to the stand, seated and sworn in, and gave his name, serial number, and unit in prescribed fashion*)

Defense Counsel: Cpl. Bragan, I am going to read part of a citation that Cpl. Chandler received accompanying an award for the Silver Star. "On 11 April 45, Cpl. Chandler volunteered along with seven other men to lead a patrol out to reconnoiter a Japanese strong point in a neighboring village. On reach-

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ing the village, he found that approximately one battalion of Japanese were located there. Cpl. Chandler, in compliance with his orders, attempted to enter the village, but finding how strongly it was defended, he quickly withdrew his men to a group of trees outside the village. When Japanese forces came out in an attempt to capture him and his men, he kept the latter well concealed, and by the use of a light machine gun and an automatic rifle managed to keep the enemy patrol from coming into the woods. That night, because two of his men were wounded and unable to withdraw, he and his other men remained and beat off attacks by stronger forces the following day. That night, one of the men died, and he removed the other one, returning to his company area and providing valuable intelligence data about the defenses of the village. Cpl. Chandler obtained this information at great danger to his own personal safety . . ." Now, Cpl. Bragan, did you submit this story?

Cpl. Bragan: I did, sir.

Defense Counsel: And was it in accordance with the true facts?

Cpl. Bragan: Well, yes, sir, as I submitted it. But in my report I said Cpl. Chandler was *ordered* to lead the patrol. Lt. Graham must have changed it.

Defense Counsel: Are you sure, Cpl. Bragan, that Cpl. Chandler was ordered to lead the patrol?

Cpl. Bragan: Yes, sir, I am, because when they called for volunteers, these all had to be below the rank of Cpl. Chandler.

Defense Counsel: Are you aware, Corporal, that Lt. Graham and Cpl. Chandler were close friends?

Cpl. Bragan: Yes, sir. We all knew that.

Defense Counsel: Does it not seem plausible that Lt. Graham may have changed that report in order to divert suspicion from himself in sending his best friend on a possibly fatal mission?

TJA: Objection. That is pure conjecture.

President: Objection sustained.

Defense Counsel: I merely wished to point out that the irregularity of changing the report would seem to indicate that Lt. Graham may have wished his friend to be killed, in which case Cpl. Chandler may have acted in self-defense.

TJA: I would point out to the Counsel for the Defense that an equally plausible interpretation is that Lt. Graham changed the report to read volunteered in order to put his friend in an even more favorable light.

President: Since motive has not been proved, nothing is gained by these conjectures. You will proceed with the case.

Defense Counsel: That is all I have. My case rests.

President: Has the TJA any questions?

TJA: No, sir.

Maj. Bell: Before we conclude the testimony, as a member of the

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court I would like to ask Capt. Brown one question.

President: Capt. Brown will return to the stand. You are reminded, Captain, that you are still under oath.

Maj. Bell: Capt. Brown, is a mission like the one just mentioned ordinarily done by order or on a volunteer basis?

Capt. Brown: Ordinarily we call for volunteers, sir.

Maj. Bell: Had you not been apprised by G-2 that this was a job for a whole platoon?

Capt. Brown: I had, sir, and I'd passed on that information to Lt. Graham.

Maj. Bell: Why, then, did only eight men perform the mission?

Capt. Brown: I don't know, sir, but as the mission was accomplished, I didn't question it.

Maj. Bell: That's all.

President: Are there any further questions? (*No answer*) Defense Counsel, has the defendant been advised of his rights to testify?

Defense Counsel: He has, sir, and he has nothing to say.

President: TJA, proceed with your argument.

TJA: Mr. President, other members of the court, I believe we have proved without a doubt that Cpl. Chandler deliberately shot and killed his commanding officer, Lt. Graham. Two witnesses have testified clearly to that fact. In addition we have shown that this was a planned and premeditated murder, and that it was not motivated by combat fatigue or some other mental disorder. I therefore ask the court to impose upon Cpl. Chandler the maximum sentence for this offense — the death penalty.

Defense Counsel: I deny that the defendant has been proved guilty of a planned and premeditated murder. In the first place, no motive has been discovered. In the second place, the testimony of the two witnesses is definitely open to question since their observations took place in the heat of battle — during which time it is unlikely they could accurately determine the defendant's actions, and during which time no one has testified as to *their* mental condition. Thirdly, I ask you to consider the defendant's reputation and record, and ask yourselves if such a man would cold-bloodedly and for no reason shoot down his superior officer and best friend.

President: Is there any rebuttal?

TJA: No, sir.

(*At this point the court was cleared. After thirty-five minutes, the defendant was called in. He was thereupon pronounced guilty and sentenced to death subject to the approval of the Secretary of War*)

* * *

SUBJECT: Case of Cpl. Robert Chandler 3xxxxxxx

TO: The Inspector General

Attached is the file on Cpl. Chandler's case. This has not only aroused much public interest, but the President has

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received a letter from the corporal's mother. The President reviewed the case and suggests that before we proceed with carrying out the sentence we make every effort to establish a motive for the crime.

It is therefore ordered that you send someone to Okinawa to find out what possible reason Cpl. Chandler may have had for murdering Lt. Graham.

Xxxxxxx X. Xxxxxxxxx
Secretary of War

30 Sept 45

* * *

SUBJECT: Report on the Chandler Case

TO: The Inspector General

A month's investigation proved almost fruitless. I talked with many people, including Chandler, but was unable to find the slightest clue as to why Chandler may have wanted to kill Graham.

Among other people I talked to was the battalion chaplain. He was very reluctant to talk, so much so that it was apparent to me that he knew something of importance about the affair. Finally, I persuaded him to give me the enclosed letter which he had shown me in the greatest confidence.

I think you will agree with me that this letter, found among Graham's personal effects, may change the whole aspect of the case.

Xxxxx X. Xxxxxxxx
Colonel IGD

28 Oct 45

Enclosure:

1412 Lukens Blvd.
Oakland, Calif.
May 31, 1945

Lt. Lee Graham O-xxxxxxxx
APO #xx, c/o Postmaster

Dearest Lee —

My darling, I feel as though I can't stand not seeing you — how is it possible to love anyone as much as I love you and live apart? If anything happened to you I couldn't go on.

My dear, I'm going crazy if something doesn't happen soon. How could our plans for the mission have misfired?

Dearest, don't worry about what we're doing. It isn't easy for me either. But the one fine and beautiful thing in my life is you, and once this is all over *nothing* can keep us apart. Nothing is as big or as sure as my love for you, and nothing so important as yours for me. What else is there in this crazy world?

Do you think Bob could be suspicious? His mother may know something, and he believes everything she says. He doesn't seem to want to give me the money. He mustn't find out about us. Can't you send him on another mission — or think of some other way?

It isn't wrong, my darling, believe me. It's right and inevitable. You must have courage — you must *act soon!*

I love you always,

Verne

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In 1920 John Leslie Palmer, dramatic critic and editor, joined the Permanent Secretariat of the League of Nations, at Geneva. The Secretariat, unhappily, proved far from Permanent. But Mr. Palmer met another member of the Secretariat, a famous man-about-continent bearing one of the most distinguished English-sounding names we have ever heard outside a "serious" novel — Hilary Aidan St. George Saunders. (And that reminds us, quite irrelevantly, that Robert Louis Stevenson, who had an exceptional flair for le nom juste, *once wrote to Sir James M. Barrie that Stevenson's uncle "has simply the finest name in the world, Ramsay Traquair.") Anyway, Messrs. Palmer and Saunders discovered that they had many things in common, besides working for the League of Nations: they were both Oxford men; they both had literary leanings; and they both had a particular weakness for "full-blooded, high-sounding and richly melodramatic carryings-on."*

In a phrase, they both liked detective stories. Thus was born the pseudonym of "Francis Beeding," and under that name Messrs. Saunders and Palmer have produced "many superior mystery novels" — including DEATH WALKS IN EASTREPPS *(which Vincent Starrett has ranked as "one of the ten greatest detective novels"),* THE HOUSE OF DR. EDWARDES *(which has more than once been the basis of a moving picture), and that series of books with the most ambitious of all continuity-titles,* THE ONE SANE MAN, THE TWO UNDERTAKERS, THE THREE FISHERS, THE FOUR ARMOURERS, THE FIVE FLAMBOYS, THE SIX PROUD WALKERS, THE SEVEN SLEEPERS, *and ad (we fervently hope) infinitum.*

And now we give you Francis Beeding's finest performance in the short story field — the pathetic tale of Bert Higgins, an innocent man, waiting in the death house for a last-minute reprieve. You will find an Ambrose Bierce quality in the story, too; indeed, though we do not know what English prison Francis Beeding had in mind, the story might have been called "An Occurrence at Pentonville."

CONDEMNED!

by FRANCIS BEEDING

BERT HIGGINS pulled on his trousers and looked round for his collar and tie.

It was quite comfortable in the condemned cell, but dark. There was a fire in the grate and that, in itself, was a luxury to which Bert Higgins was not accustomed.

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These were his own clothes — the double-breasted blue serge suit in which he had been tried. They had taken it away from him after sentence and given him prison clothes. But today they had given it back to him.

This meant, of course, that the reprieve had come at last. It must have arrived during the night. But he could not go out into the street, reprieve or no reprieve, without a collar and tie.

"Collar," he said, "where's my collar, Joe?"

Joe was a nice fellow — nicer than the other warder, Mike.

Joe turned away, a little awkwardly, and stared at the window which, since it was of frosted glass, was not of much use as a peep-show.

"You won't be needin' them," he said.

"Not needin' them?" Bert began to protest.

Then he stopped and smiled.

Joe, of course, was under a false impression. Joe believed that he, Bert Higgins, was going to be hanged. That, however, was absurd. It simply wasn't done. Only criminals were hanged. He was not a criminal. He was innocent. He hadn't done it and a man was never hanged if he hadn't done it.

"Anything you fancy for breakfast, Bert?"

It was Joe speaking. He had a face as long as a yard measure. Bert, in his superior knowledge of English justice, smiled at him reassuringly.

"Breakfast," he said. "I don't mind ownin' I feel a bit peckish. Could they run to a steak and chips, d'ye think?"

Joe looked at him a moment.

"I'll see what we can do, mate," he answered and went to the little trap in the door which he slid back, saying a word to someone outside.

"It will be along in ten minutes," he announced, turning away from the door.

"That's prime," said Bert. "Got a fag about you, Joe?"

Warder Joe silently produced a packet of Gold Flakes. Bert lit up, and bent to lace his boots.

Why didn't they hurry up with that reprieve? It was cruel to keep a fellow waiting. Suppose, for example, he had been one of those nervous chaps. He would be carrying on something dreadful now, imagining things. It was past eight o'clock already — not quite another hour to run.

Bert smiled again. He hadn't done it. They couldn't hang him because he hadn't done it. The reprieve was bound to come.

Mechanically he put on his vest. What would he do first, on leaving the prison? It was no use going home. Amy was dead. That was the only thing that had really troubled him at all through the business of the trial — a much worse thing than anything that had happened since his arrest, much worse than when the old geezer in the wig and red robes had put that silly bit of black cloth on his napper and told him he was going to be hanged by the neck.

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There was no getting over it. He loved Amy. Always had. And he would miss her cruel. It wasn't her fault if she was a bit flighty. She could not help being flighty any more than he could help having his pint and then some more at the *Goat and Compasses*. Besides, there had never been anything wrong, really. Not what you would call wrong. And naturally, with her that pretty, she had her temptations.

Pretty, indeed. Amy was lovely, like a rose from Covent Garden, a whole bunch of roses. That parson chap who had married them had said he had never seen a 'andsomer couple, and as this thought passed through his mind, Bert stopped in front of the mirror and began, with great care and a comb wetted in the basin, to arrange his hair.

He had won Amy, won her fair and square, from the lot of them — including George, who would soon be standing where he, Bert Higgins, stood that day. For George had done it and there would be no reprieve for George.

George had begun by taking them out, both of them, to the pictures and to a little fish and chips afterwards.

So it had gone on till one day he had come back from looking for a job of work to find George and Amy in the parlor together. Sitting on the sofa, they were, and there had been words with Amy about it that evening and Amy had been saucy and he had smacked her face and she had thrown the saucepan at him, and the biggest black eye you ever saw had begun to sprout where the saucepan had hit him. But when Amy had seen it next day she had cried and kissed him and gone out and got a bit of meat to put on his eye. And he had said they ought to eat it and they had laughed together. Quick-tempered Amy was . . . had been.

A sob rose in his throat, but he gulped it down and at that moment the door of the cell opened.

It was Mike with the breakfast.

Bert sat down and began to peg away. But his mind was not on the food though the steak tasted good. He had started to think again of his final quarrel with Amy, not about George, this time, but something quite silly — the sort of thing people quarrel about in music halls. He couldn't even remember what it was. Yet he would never forget that Saturday evening as long as he lived — not as long as he lived.

Well, he was only twenty-four. No reason why he should not live till seventy — after the reprieve.

Amy had been violent again and he had raised his hand, but he hadn't meant to strike her. This time she had thrown the coffee-pot. But it had missed him and hit the wall and made a hell of a clatter. And he turned on his heel and walked straight out into the fog.

That was the first misfortune. No one had seen him leaving the house.

He had made his way to the *Goat and Compasses*. But it had taken him some time, for the fog had been so

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thick. There he had taken a drink and what with one thing and another . . . well, he had taken several drinks and his pal, Harry, being sympathetic, had poured gin in his beer and suggested he should go home and give Amy a good walloping.

"Bert," he had said, "what she wants is a firm 'and." . . .

So he had started back home meaning to give Amy what she wanted. But it had taken him half an hour to get home.

Half an hour to go from the *Goat and Compasses* to Westbury Terrace when it was only five minutes' walk.

Nobody, of course, believed it — least of all that nasty little man with the twitching nose who had conducted the prosecution.

Yet what could have been more natural? He had just wandered round the street for half an hour making up his mind to go in and wallop Amy. And then, when at last he had gone in. . . .

Bert pushed away his unfinished cup of tea. He suddenly felt he did not want any more breakfast. He still saw Amy lying there, in the bedroom upstairs, with her head all cut open and a broken beer bottle lying on the floor. He would remember that to his dying day . . . his dying day.

He had picked up the bottle and at that moment the coppers had come. Old Green from next door brought them. Old Green heard the row earlier in the evening and he hadn't seen the prisoner — that was him — Bert Higgins — leave the house or come back. Old Green had sworn to having heard several such rows before. He had testified in court that Amy and Bert Higgins were on bad terms with each other, which was a lie. He had always been on the best of terms with Amy. Bad terms, indeed!

Nobody had seen George enter or leave the house. But that was only because of the fog. George, of course, must have come along while he was at the *Goat and Compasses.* It was George who had sloshed Amy with the beer bottle. Wasn't he employed by a brewery? But that prosecutin' fellow had pointed out that you could get a bottle of Bishop's ale anywhere and that there were several bottles of it in Bert's own kitchen.

George must have had a row with Amy, the same as he had. But while he had only hit her with his hand, George had sloshed her with a bottle.

That was what had happened, but he couldn't prove it and George had dug up an old sweetheart who had sworn he had been with her at the time and that was what they called an alibi.

There came a knock at the door and Warder Joe crossed the cell.

"Chaplain to see you, mate," he announced.

"Not for me," said Bert. "'E'll only talk to me about a future life and this one's good enough for me."

Bert spent the next quarter of an hour walking up and down his cell. They were cutting things rather fine with the reprieve. But those government chaps were always like that.

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Look at the clerks at the Labor Exchange. It took you hours to draw the dole. Lack of organization, that's what it was.

But here, at last, was the governor. Chap in gray with a white mustache. Behind him were three men in dark clothes. Two of them had their hands behind their backs as though they were hiding something. Behind them again was the chaplain. There was no getting away from these parsons.

"Put your hands behind your back, please."

It was one of the men in dark clothes speaking. Warder Joe stood at his elbow. Somebody seized his arms firmly above the elbows. Something tight was pressing against them and he found suddenly that they had been strapped behind him. Another of the men in dark clothes was slipping something over his head, something woolly, a woolen bag.

" 'Ere," protested Bert Higgins.

But they had pulled it right down to his neck and he could not see and his protest was stifled. But he could hear all right. The chaplain was at him now.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, though he be dead, yet shall he live."

" 'Ere," Bert protested again.

But no one answered him. He felt himself being pushed firmly forward. His feet touched stone as he walked, then wood. The wood quivered a little beneath his feet and he was brought to a halt. At the same moment something was slipped over his head.

It rasped his neck as it settled on his shoulders and a hard lump sat uncomfortably to the left underneath his chin.

" 'Ere," protested Bert Higgins for the third time.

The hands which had touched him, moved away. He was suddenly alone. . . .

Footsteps sounded somewhere. A door creaked. A voice cried out sharply in the darkness.

"Here you are, Governor. Straight from the Home Secretary."

There was a crackle of paper. The Governor was saying something.

Bert Higgins breathed a sigh of relief. They had cut it pretty fine but this was just what he had expected.

Yes, that was right. They were untying his arms. The woolen bag was pulled from his face and there stood the Governor smiling at him.

"A narrow squeak," the Governor was saying. "But the reprieve has come at last. George Butterworth was arrested early this morning."

"And may God have mercy on his soul," said Bert Higgins, as he followed the Governor from the cell.

Could they be at the prison gates already?

"Here they are, mate," said Joe and Bert Higgins perceived that the warder was offering him a collar and tie.

But first he must shake hands with the Governor.

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"Goodbye, Higgins," said the Governor.

"So long, Guv-ner."

It was raining as usual and the streets were sombre and gray. That was a tram. It was fading with a noise of bells, into the fog. Bert Higgins ran after it. His legs were heavy and reluctant, but by a supreme effort he jumped on board and found a place.

He sat in the train. Time passed. He was being carried quite a long way and suddenly he perceived that the tram was empty. The conductor, wearing a mackintosh cape, loomed in from the fog.

"Terminus, mate," he said. "Tram don't go no further."

Bert Higgins left the tram. The streets were very dark and the fog was thickening. But Bert could see quite clearly where he was. That was Westbury Terrace. Why had he come to Westbury Terrace? Force of habit, he supposed. Was the house still empty or had it a new tenant? He did not want to walk down that familiar street but his feet dragged him forward.

There stood the door, same as ever, a dirty green. It hadn't had a spot of paint on it for years.

But the steps were nice and white. Who could have cleaned them, now Amy was gone. He pushed open the door and entered the hall. A light shone from the kitchen and someone was standing at the wooden table. It was a woman and her back was turned to him. She stood at the table with a rolling pin in her hand, rolling . . . rolling.

The woman turned and looked at him. She was all in white . . . in her wedding dress, and there was flour on her forearms.

"Hello, Bert," said Amy, "thought you was never comin'."

"Yes, Mr. Coroner," said the prison doctor, "death was practically instantaneous. The pulse had already ceased to beat when I reached the body. The man was dead before he knew it."

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QUEEN'S QUORUM: *Part Two*

by ELLERY QUEEN

When the world was born, Man came first and Woman second. God so ordained. When the detective in fiction was born, Man again came first and Woman second — so Man himself ordained. If we think of Poe's Dupin as the Adam of story-book sleuths, who is the Eve? The Lord said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." And out of the man's rib made He a woman — and so it came to pass in fictional ferretry. A full twenty years after the creation of Dupin an unknown writer brought forth the first detectivette, and so shrouded in mystery is her origin that we still have only tentative data on her nativity. We do know that

5. "Anonyma's"
THE EXPERIENCES OF A LADY DETECTIVE
London: ? Charles H. Clarke, 1861

actually exists as a book, but we have never set eyes on a copy of it. A sequel was published three years later titled REVELATIONS OF A LADY DETECTIVE (London: George Vickers, 1864) and from this second series we learn that Mrs. Paschal, the first petticoated policeman, embarked (using her own words) in a career at once strange, exciting, and mysterious when her husband died suddenly, leaving her badly off. An offer (still quoting the lady herself) was made to her through a peculiar channel. She accepted without hesitation, and became one of the much-dreaded, but little-known people called Female Detectives, at the time she was verging on forty (even in the literature of detection Life Begins At Forty). Mrs. Paschal's brain, she tells us, was vigorous and subtle; she was well born and well educated, so that, like an accomplished actress, she could play her part in any drama with nerve and strength, cunning and confidence, and resources unlimited . . . That was nearly a hundred years ago: women have not changed — in real life or in fiction.

In 1862 Thomas Bailey Aldrich made a curious and interesting contribution to the detective short story — a contribution which today is com-

Original version of "Queen's Quorum" from TWENTIETH CENTURY DETECTIVE STORIES, *edited by Ellery Queen.* *Copyright, 1948, by The World Publishing Company.*

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pletely unhonored and unsung, for the simple reason that it is so completely unknown, and consequently unread. In

6. Thomas Bailey Aldrich's
OUT OF HIS HEAD
New York: Carleton, 1862

Chapters XI through XIV (titled *The Danseuse*, *A Mystery*, *Thou Art the Man*, and *Paul's Confession*) constitute a detective short story of approximately 5000 words. This excerpt from Aldrich's novelette reveals the author's enormous debt to Poe: the style, although retaining Aldrich's cameo-cut phrasing, clearly shows the influence of Poe, and the general plot derives just as clearly from *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Yet, in the character of his detective, Paul Lynde ("It is a way of mine to put this and that together!"), and in the specific construction of the plot, Aldrich adds at least three significant points of development to the detective story: one, he created the first variation-solution to Poe's basic conception of the "locked room" mystery; two, he carried on Poe's tradition of an eccentric sleuth, but Aldrich pushed the characterization to the absolute extreme — for Aldrich's detective is not merely an eccentric, he is a madman; three, Aldrich wrote what is probably the earliest example of a detective story in which the protagonist is not only the detective but also the murderer, in the sense that the detective himself is responsible for the murder having been committed. Add to these developments of technique the fact that Aldrich's OUT OF HIS HEAD contains the first detective story written by an American to appear in book form after the publication of Poe's tall TALES — the first in seventeen long and barren years! — and recognition, however belated, must be accorded to the historical importance of Aldrich's "unknown" experiment.

Thus far our cornerstones stick closely to the pure detective story, which is composed of three essential ingredients: first, a detective story must contain a detective who detects; second, the detective should be the protagonist; and third, the detective should almost invariably triumph — that is, he (or she) should unmask the murderer, catch the thief, snare the swindler, or thwart the blackmailer. But what of the crook story in which a criminal is the principal character and in which the criminal outwits the forces of law and order?

The antihero, representing "detection in reverse," has not yet cracked open his (or her) eggshell in the short form — he is still germinating; but even the detective world was so made that certain signs come before certain events. The first important foreshadowing of crime-in-the-ascendancy in the short story is

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7. Mark Twain's
THE CELEBRATED JUMPING FROG
OF CALAVERAS COUNTY
New York: C. H. Webb, 1867

This acknowledged classic of legend and folklore is an early example of the confidence game in fiction. If this statement surprises you, reread Mark Twain's tale of trickery and ask yourself: When the slick stranger filled Jim Smiley's frog, Dan'l Webster, full of quail-shot, wasn't he really playing the con?

It is time now for France to make its first significant contribution to the detective short story, and it is only literary justice that *le premier pas* be taken by the first great French master of the detective story. In

8. Émile Gaboriau's
LE PETIT VIEUX DES BATIGNOLLES
(THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES)
Paris: E. Dentu, 1876
London: Vizetelly, 1884

the title story is a novelette about detective Méchinet; but the book also contains a short story titled *Missing!* in which the "famous" detective Retiveau, nicknamed Maître Magloire, investigates the disappearance of Théodore Jandidier, an honorable manufacturer of the Rue du Roi de Sicile. This historically important short story is a typical Gaboriau murder-novel in miniature — longwinded for modern taste but full of French flavor, Gallic gusto, and ratiocinative realism. Quotations from the story reveal the Gaboriau touch: for example, when it is learned that M. Jandidier has "vanished, evaporated," we are told that alarm spreads and that prudent people invest money in sword sticks and revolvers; detective Magloire is described as "a man of no little energy, and a fervent believer in the value of time . . . his alacrity was proverbial"; the chief suspect is a character named Jules Tarot — "a mother-of-pearl worker . . . he polishes the shells, and is most skilful in imparting the proper nacreous iridescence"; there is that delicious detectival moment, so dear to the hearts of classicists, when "all the drawers were turned out, and all the cupboards carefully explored," when Magloire "ferreted in every nook and corner, ripped up the mattresses and pillows on the bed, tried the stuffing of the chairs, but all to no avail . . . nothing suspicious could be found"; that even more nostalgic moment when, anticipating Sherlock Holmes, the detective mutters: "It's singular"; that "unexpected" denouement when the man of severe morality is exposed as a gambler on the Bourse, when the virtuous husband is revealed to have kept a mistress.

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Ah, the glory that was gore and the grandeur that was grue! Even the translator's footnote has its criminological charm: "It should be remembered that a very large number of Parisian doorkeepers or concierges are secret agents of the Prefecture de Police." And finally, to fill our cup of bloodhound bliss, the detective admits his failure, consults the great Monsieur Lecoq himself, and is put on the right track. And yet, in all these now-hackneyed devices, glitter the truly historic moments in detective-story history.

In England, at this time, a writer using the pen-name of James M'Govan began to achieve an impressive popularity; his books ran into umpteenth editions. Today his pseudonym is known only to a select coterie of enthusiasts, and first editions of his work are unheard-of. Our own copy of

9. James M'Govan's
BROUGHT TO BAY
Edinburgh: John Menzies, 1878

bears a full-page inscription in which M'Govan reveals his true identity — probably the only time he admitted authorship of the M'Govan stories in writing or in print. The inscription reads: To David L. Cromb this collection of GOOD LIES is given by the author, Wm C. Honeyman. According to Mr. Cromb, an English literary agent, "M'Govan" was a little, bandy-legged man, with a black spade beard; he invariably wore a velvet jacket; his chief interest in life was playing the violin and he was rarely seen without his violin case; his house in Newport-on-Tay was actually named Cremona. Indeed, truth is often stranger than fiction: Isn't that a perfect description of the typically eccentric stock-detective-character?

It is interesting to note in passing that the brilliant George Bernard Shaw wrote his first and only detective story in 1879 — eight years before Sherlock Holmes made his debut in print. According to F. E. Loewenstein's letter in "John O' London's Weekly," issue of November 16, 1945, the story was titled *The Brand of Cain*, and its plot was based on the scientifically accurate fact that a photograph sometimes reveals marks on the skin that are invisible to the naked eye: small-pox pustules, for example, before the eruptions become visible. In the story a woman has murdered her husband. During the struggle the husband has struck his wife in the face with a brand which he had been heating in order to stamp his monogram. The wife manages to obliterate the mark before the police see it, thus saving herself from arrest. Later, however, she is persuaded by a photographer to sit for a portrait, and in the dark-room the photographer finds an unaccountable mark on the negative. The mark is identified eventually as "the brand of Cain."

The publishing history of this tale is almost impossible to credit, in view

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of Bernard Shaw's gigantic present-day reputation. He submitted the story in 1879 to the six top British magazines of the time, including "The Cornhill," "Blackwood's," and "Chambers's Edinburgh Journal." They all declined with thanks. Four years later, the story still unsold, Mr. Shaw sent the only copy of the manuscript to Hawkes & Phipps, a Birmingham firm of stereotype founders who supplied ready-set columns for the Press. Nothing further was heard, and when Mr. Shaw inquired in January 1884, he was informed by Hawkes & Phipps that they knew nothing of such a manuscript, and to this day no trace of the manuscript has been found — not since that pre-Sherlockian day more than half a century ago.

In America, at this time, the lush period of our Dime Novel was in full flower. George Munro had started publishing the first Dime Novel detective series in 1872 — Old Sleuth Library; Old Cap Collier was soon to make his bow, in 1883, "piping" the New Haven Mystery; and less than a decade later Nick Carter was to begin one of the longest crime-crushing careers in history. Between 1870 and 1910 more than six thousand different detective Dime Novels were published in the United States, but less than a score of them were books of short stories. The earliest one

10. DETECTIVE SKETCHES
[By A New York Detective]
New York: Frank Tousey, April 2, 1881

deserves cornerstone recognition. And while such stalwart manhunters as Clark, Sharp, Old King Brady, and Felix Boyd were flourishing, the female of the species was slowly organizing, fighting for equal sleuthian rights. Between the Dime Novel pictorial wrappers appeared occasional capers of Lady Bess, Lizzie Lasher (The Red Weasel), and Lucilla Lynx. The Ellery Queen collection contains all the known books of Dime Novel shorts, secured for us by our good friend Charles Bragin, the foremost authority on and collector of Dime Novels. Mr. Bragin was the "secret agent" for Franklin D. Roosevelt, who also collected certain types of Dime Novels. When Mr. Bragin purchased a miscellaneous lot of Dime Novels, at auction or out of some dusty attic, he usually gave President Roosevelt first choice of the Dime Novels he wanted, and Ellery Queen first choice of the short stories. It is doubtful if President Roosevelt was ever aware that Ellery Queen shared some of his most precious "finds" in this field.

The next key book is one of the most famous works in English literature. Who among us, with even a spark of boyhood in his heart, will ever forget *The Suicide Club* or *The Pavilion on the Links** in

* Conan Doyle considered *The Pavilion on the Links* "the very model of dramatic narrative."

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11. Robert Louis Stevenson's
NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS
London: Chatto & Windus, 1882

Stevenson fused ferreting and fantasy; he revealed roguery through the rose-colored reflector of romance. Yet it was Stevenson's genius to be a romanticist with feet of realism. As early as 1892 Stevenson saw the handwriting on the wall so far as the future of the detective story was concerned; in collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne he wrote: "We had long been at once attracted and repelled by . . . the police novel or mystery story, which consists in beginning your yarn anywhere but at the beginning, and finishing it anywhere but at the end; attracted by . . . the peculiar difficulties that attend its execution; repelled by that appearance of insincerity and shallowness of tone, which seem its inevitable drawback. For the mind of the reader . . . receives no impression of reality or life, rather of an airless, elaborate mechanism . . . If the tale were gradually approached, some of the characters introduced (as it were) beforehand, and the book started in the tone of a novel of manners and experience briefly treated, this defect might be lessened and our mystery seem to inhere in life." This remarkable prescience (and omniscience) more than fifty years ago!

Two years after NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS, there appeared in book form a literary riddle whose fame has increased steadily with the passing years. This tale of pure mystery

12. Frank R. Stockton's
THE LADY, OR THE TIGER?
New York: Charles Scribner, 1884

has no detective *in* the story, but there are countless detectives *outside* the story — all created by the author's last sentence which reads: "And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door, — the lady, or the tiger?" This question has transformed every reader (literally millions since 1884) into an Armchair Detective. It is interesting to record, however, that no satisfactory solution of the problem has ever been advanced.*

The second most famous literary puzzle is without doubt Cleveland Moffett's THE MYSTERIOUS CARD. This short story, the theme of which has been rewritten by dozens of authors since, first appeared in the Boston

* This statement is no longer true. Jack Moffitt submitted a short story called *The Lady and the Tiger* to the Third Annual Detective Short Story Contest sponsored by "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine," and won a Special Prize for the Best Tour de Force. Mr. Moffitt's solution to the most famous of literary riddles is positively brilliant; it appeared in the September 1948 issue of *EQMM*, and later in THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1948 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948).

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magazine, "The Black Cat," February 1896; it was published in book form by Small, Maynard of Boston some time between 1896 and 1912 — the exact year is unknown, even the Library of Congress having no date on record.

One version of "the mysterious card" theme has eluded our most persistent book researches. It tells how a sailor on shore leave finds a piece of paper with unfamiliar words on it in a foreign language. The sailor takes it to various people for translation, but in each instance the person consulted refuses to divulge the meaning of the words and instead beats up, kicks, and otherwise abuses the poor sailor. Finally the sailor returns to his ship, the riddle unsolved. On shipboard he meets an archeologist who, the sailor thinks, might be able to satisfy his now uncontrollable curiosity. The sailor approaches the man at the rail of the ship, relates the whole back history, emphasizing his complete innocence. The archeologist agrees to translate the words on the paper and, no matter what they may mean, not to hold the sailor responsible. The sailor takes the slip of paper from his pocket and is about to hand it to the archeologist when a sudden gust of wind lifts the scrap from his hand and tosses it on the sea, where it immediately disappears from sight. And thus the mystery remains unanswered forever.

(*to be continued next month*)

OUT OF HIS HEAD

by THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

I: The Danseuse

THE ensuing summer I returned North depressed by the result of my sojourn in New Orleans. It was only by devoting myself, body and soul, to some intricate pursuit that I could dispel the gloom which threatened seriously to affect my health.

The Moon-Apparatus was insufficient to distract me. I turned my attention to mechanism, and was successful in producing several wonderful pieces of work, among which may be mentioned a brass butterfly, made to flit so naturally in the air as to deceive the most acute observers. The motion of the toy, the soft down and gorgeous damask-stains on the pinions, were declared quite perfect. The thing is rusty and won't work now; I tried to set it going for Dr. Pendegrast, the other day.

A mannikin musician, playing a few exquisite airs on a miniature piano, likewise excited much admiration. This figure bore such an absurd, unintentional resemblance to a gentleman who has since distinguished himself as a pianist that I presented the

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trifle to a lady admirer of Gottschalk.

I also became a taxidermist, and stuffed a pet bird with springs and diminutive flutes, causing it to hop and carol in its cage with great glee. But my masterpiece was a nimble white mouse, with pink eyes, that could scamper up the walls, and masticate bits of cheese in an extraordinary style. My chambermaid shrieked and jumped up on a chair whenever I let the little fellow loose in her presence. One day, unhappily, the mouse, while nosing around after its favorite aliment, got snapped in a rat-trap that yawned in the closet, and I was never able to readjust the machinery.

Engaged in these useful inventions — useful, because no exercise of the human mind is ever in vain — my existence for two or three years was so placid and uneventful, I began to hope that the shadows which had followed on my path from childhood, making me unlike other men, had returned to that unknown world where they properly belong; but the Fates were only taking breath to work out more surely the problem of my destiny. I must keep nothing back. I must extenuate nothing.

I am about to lift the veil of mystery which, for nearly seven years, has shrouded the story of Mary Ware; and though I lay bare my own weakness, or folly, or what you will, I do not shrink from the unveiling.

No hand but mine can now perform the task. There was, indeed, a man who might have done this better than I. But he went his way in silence. I like a man who can hold his tongue.

On the corner of Clarke and Crandall Streets in New York stands a dingy brown frame-house. It is a very old house, as its obsolete style of structure would tell you. It has a morose, unhappy look, though once it must have been a blithe mansion. I think that houses, like human beings, ultimately become dejected or cheerful, according to their experience. The very air of some front-doors tells their history.

This house, I repeat, has a morose, unhappy look at present and is tenanted by an incalculable number of families, while a picturesque junk-shop is in full blast in the basement; but at the time of which I write it was a second-rate boarding-place, of the more respectable sort, and rather largely patronized by poor, but honest, literary men, tragic-actors, members of the chorus, and such-like gilt people.

My apartments on Crandall Street were opposite this building, to which my attention was directed soon after taking possession of the rooms, by the discovery of the following facts:

First, that a charming lady lodged on the second-floor front, and sang like a canary every morning.

Second, that her name was Mary Ware.

Third, that Mary Ware was a danseuse, and had two lovers — only two.

Mary Ware was the leading lady at The Olympic. Night after night found me in the parquette. I can

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think of nothing with which to compare the airiness and utter abandon of her dancing. She seemed a part of the music. She was one of beauty's best thoughts, then. Her glossy gold hair reached down to her waist, shading one of those mobile faces which remind you of Guido's picture of Beatrix Cenci — there was something so fresh and enchanting in the mouth. Her luminous, almond eyes, looking out winningly from under their drooping fringes, were at once the delight and misery of young men.

Ah! you were distracting in your nights of triumph, when the bouquets nestled about your elastic ankles, and the kissing of your castanets made the pulses leap; but I remember when you lay on your cheerless bed, in the blank daylight, with the glory faded from your brow, and "none so poor as to do you reverence."

Then I stooped down and kissed you — but not till then.

Mary Ware was to me a finer study than her lovers. She had two, as I have said. One of them was commonplace enough — well-made, well-dressed, shallow, flaccid. Nature, when she gets out of patience with her best works, throws off such things by the gross, instead of swearing. He was a Lieutenant, in the navy I think. The gilt button has charms to soothe the savage breast.

The other was a man of different mould, and interested me in a manner for which I could not then account. The first time I saw him did not seem like the first time. But this, perhaps, is only an after-impression.

Every line of his countenance denoted character; a certain capability, I mean, but whether for good or evil was not so plain. I should have called him handsome, but for a noticeable scar which ran at right angles across his mouth, giving him a sardonic expression when he smiled.

His frame might have set an anatomist wild with delight — six feet two, deep-chested, knitted with tendons of steel. Not at all a fellow to amble on plush carpets.

"Some day," thought I, as I saw him stride by the house, "he will throw the little Lieutenant out of that second-story window."

I cannot tell, to this hour, which of those two men Mary Ware loved more — for I think she loved them both. A woman's heart was the insolvable charade with which the Sphinx nipped the Egyptians. I was never good at puzzles.

The flirtation, however, was food enough for the whole neighborhood. But faintly did the gossips dream of the strange drama that was being shaped out, as compactly as a tragedy of Sophocles, under their noses.

They were very industrious in tearing Mary Ware's good name to pieces. Some laughed at the gay Lieutenant, and some at Julius Kenneth; but they all amiably united in condemning Mary Ware.

This, possibly, was strictly proper, for Mary Ware was a woman: the woman is always to blame in such cases; the man is hereditarily and con-

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stitutionally in the right; the woman is born in the wrong. That is the world's verdict, that is what Justice says; but we should weigh the opinion of Justice with care, since she is represented, by poets and sculptors, not satirically, I trust, as a blind Woman.

It was so from the beginning. Was not the first lady of the world the cause of all our woe? I feel safe in leaving it to a jury of gentle dames. But from all such judges, had I a sister on trial good Lord deliver her.

This state of affairs had continued for five or six months, when it was reported that Julius Kenneth and Mary Ware were affianced. The Lieutenant was less frequently seen in Crandall Street, and Julius waited upon Mary's footsteps with the fidelity of a shadow.

Mrs. Grundy was somewhat appeased.

Yet — though Mary went to the Sunday concerts with Julius Kenneth, she still wore the Lieutenant's roses in her bosom.

Mrs. Grundy said that.

II: A Mystery

One drizzly November morning — how well I remember it! — I was awakened by a series of nervous raps on my bedroom door. The noise startled me from an unpleasant dream.

"Oh, sir!" cried the chambermaid on the landing. "There's been a dreadful time across the street. They've gone and killed Mary Ware!"

"Ah!"

That was all I could say. Cold drops of perspiration stood on my forehead.

I looked at my watch; it was eleven o'clock; I had overslept myself, having sat up late the previous night.

I dressed hastily and without waiting for breakfast pushed my way through the murky crowd that had collected in front of the house opposite, and passed upstairs, unquestioned.

When I entered the room, there were six people present: a thick-set gentleman, in black, with a bland professional air, a physician; two policemen; Adelaide Woods, an actress; Mrs. Marston, the landlady; and Julius Kenneth.

In the centre of the chamber, on the bed, lay the body of Mary Ware — as pale as Seneca's wife.

I shall never forget it. The corpse haunted me for years afterwards, the dark streaks under the eyes, and the wavy hair streaming over the pillow — the dead gold hair. I stood by her for a moment, and turned down the counterpane, which was drawn up closely to the chin.

"There was that across her throat
Which you had hardly cared to see."

At the head of the bed sat Julius Kenneth, bending over the icy hand which he held in his own. He was kissing it.

The gentleman in black was conversing in undertones with Mrs. Marston, who every now and then glanced furtively toward Mary Ware.

The two policemen were examining the doors, closets, and windows of the

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apartment with, obviously, little success.

There was no fire in the air-tight stove, but the place was suffocatingly close. I opened a window, and leaned against the casement to get a breath of fresh air.

The physician approached me. I muttered something to him indistinctly, for I was partly sick with the peculiar mouldy smell that pervaded the room.

"Yes," he began, scrutinizing me, "the affair looks very perplexing. Professional man, sir? No? Bless me! — beg pardon. Never in my life saw anything that looked so exceedingly like nothing. Thought, at first, 'twas a clear case of suicide — door locked, key on the inside, place undisturbed; but then we find no instrument with which the subject could have inflicted that wound on the neck. Queer. Party couldn't have escaped up the chimney — too small. The windows are at least thirty feet from the ground. It would be impossible for a person to jump that far, even if he could clear the iron railing below. Which he couldn't. Disagreeable things to jump on, those spikes, sir. Must have been done with a sharp knife. Queer, very. Party meant to make sure work of it. The carotid neatly severed, upon my word."

The medical gentleman went on in this monologic style for fifteen minutes, during which time Kenneth did not raise his lips from Mary's fingers.

Approaching the bed, I spoke to him; but he only shook his head.

I understood his grief.

After regaining my chamber, I sat listlessly for three or four hours, gazing into the grate. The twilight flitted in from the street; but I did not heed it. A face among the coals fascinated me. It came and went and came. Now I saw a cavern hung with lurid stalactites; now a small vesuvius vomiting smoke and flame; now a bridge spanning some tartarean gulf; then these crumbled, each in its turn, and from out the heated fragments peered the one inevitable face.

The *Evening Mirror*, of that day, gave the following detailed report of the inquest:

"This morning, at eight o'clock, Mary Ware, the celebrated danseuse, was found dead in her chamber, at her late residence on the corner of Clarke and Crandall Streets. The perfect order of the room, and the fact that the door was locked on the inside, have induced many to believe that the poor girl was the victim of her own rashness. But we cannot think so. That the door was fastened on the inner side proves nothing except, indeed, that the murderer was hidden in the apartment. That the room gave no evidence of a struggle having taken place is also an insignificant point. Two men, or even one, grappling suddenly with the deceased, who was a slight woman, would have prevented any great resistance. The deceased was dressed in a ballet-costume, and was, as we conjecture, murdered directly after her return from the theatre. On a chair near the

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bed lay several fresh bouquets, and a water-proof cloak which she was in the habit of wearing over her dancing-dress, on coming home from the theatre at night. No weapon whatever was found on the premises. We give below all the material testimony elicited by the coroner. It explains little.

"Josephine Marston deposes: I keep a boarding house at 131 Crandall Street. Miss Ware has boarded with me for the past two years. Has always borne a good character as far as I know. I do not think she had many visitors; certainly no male visitors, excepting a Lieutenant King, and Mr. Kenneth to whom she was engaged. I do not know when King was last at the house; not within three days, I am confident. Deceased told me that he had gone away. I did not see her last night when she came home. The hall-door is never locked; each of the boarders has a latch-key. The last time I saw Miss Ware was just before she went to the theatre, when she asked me to call her at eight o'clock (this morning) as she had promised to walk with 'Jules,' meaning Mr. Kenneth. I knocked at the door nine or ten times, but received no answer. Then I grew frightened and called one of the lady boarders, Miss Woods, who helped me to force the lock. The key fell on the floor inside as we pushed against the door. Mary Ware was lying on the bed, dressed. Some matches were scattered under the gas-burner by the bureau. The room presented the same appearance it does now.

"Adelaide Woods deposes: I am an actress by profession. I occupy the room next to that of the deceased. Have known her twelve months. It was half-past eleven when she came home; she stopped in my chamber for perhaps three-quarters of an hour. The call-boy of The Olympic usually accompanies her home from the theatre when she is alone. I let her in. Deceased had misplaced her night-key. The partition between our rooms is of brick; but I do not sleep soundly, and should have heard any unusual noise. Two weeks ago Miss Ware told me she was to be married to Mr. Kenneth in January next. The last time I saw them together was the day before yesterday. I assisted Mrs. Marston in breaking open the door. (Describes the position of the body, etc., etc.)

"Here the call-boy was summoned, and testified to accompanying the deceased home the night before. He came as far as the steps with her. The door was opened by a woman; could not swear it was Miss Woods, though he knows her by sight. The night was dark, and there was no lamp burning.

"Julius Kenneth deposes: I am a master-machinist. Reside at 47 Forsythe Street. Miss Ware was my cousin. We were engaged to be married next — (here the witness's voice failed him). The last time I saw her was on Wednesday morning, on which occasion we walked out together. I did not leave my room last evening: was confined by a severe cold. A Lieutenant King used to visit my cousin frequently; it created consid-

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erable talk in the neighborhood: I did not like it, and requested her to break the acquaintance. She informed me, Wednesday, that King had been ordered to some foreign station, and would trouble me no more. Was excited at the time, hinted at being tired of living; then laughed, and was gayer than she had been for weeks. Deceased was subject to fits of depression. She had engaged to walk with me this morning at eight. When I reached Clark Street I learned that she — (here the witness, overcome by emotion, was allowed to retire).

"Dr. Wren deposes: (This gentleman was very learned and voluble, and had to be suppressed several times by the coroner. We furnish a brief synopsis of his testimony.) I was called in to view the body of the deceased. A deep incision on the throat, two inches below the left ear, severing the left common carotid and the internal jugular vein, had been inflicted with some sharp instrument. Such a wound would, in my opinion, produce death almost instantaneously. The body bore no other signs of violence. Deceased must have been dead a number of hours, the rigor mortis having already supervened, etc., etc.

"Who the criminal is, and what could have led to the perpetration of the cruel act, are questions which, at present, threaten to baffle the sagacity of the police. If such deeds can be committed with impunity in a crowded city like this, who is safe from the assassin's steel?"

III: Thou Art the Man

I could but smile on reading all this serious nonsense.

After breakfast the next morning I made my toilet with extreme care, and presented myself at the sheriff's office.

Two gentlemen who were sitting at a table, busy with papers, started nervously to their feet, as I announced myself. I bowed very calmly to the sheriff, and said,

"I am the person who murdered Mary Ware!"

Of course I was instantly arrested; and that evening, in jail, I had the equivocal pleasure of reading these paragraphs among the police items of the *Mirror:*

"The individual who murdered the ballet-girl, on the night of the third inst., in a house on Crandall Street, surrendered himself to the sheriff this forenoon.

"He gave his name as Paul Lynde, and resides opposite the place where the tragedy was enacted. He is a man of medium stature, has restless gray eyes, chestnut hair, and a supernaturally pale countenance. He seems a person of excellent address, is said to be wealthy, and connected with an influential New England family. Notwithstanding his gentlemanly manner, there is that about him which would lead one to select him from out a thousand, as a man of cool and desperate character.

"Mr. Lynde's voluntary surrender is not the least astonishing feature of

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this affair; for, had he preserved silence he would, beyond a doubt, have escaped even suspicion. The murder was planned and executed with such deliberate skill that there is little or no evidence to implicate him. In truth, there is no evidence against him excepting his own confession, which is meagre and confusing enough. He freely acknowledges the crime, but stubbornly refuses to enter into any details. He expresses a desire to be hanged immediately!

"How Mr. Lynde entered the chamber, and by what means he left it after committing the deed, and why he cruelly killed a lady with whom he had had (as we gather from the testimony) no previous acquaintance — are enigmas which still perplex the public mind, and will not let curiosity sleep."

IV: Paul's Confession

On the afternoon following this disclosure, the door of my cell turned on its hinges, and Julius Kenneth entered.

In his presence I ought to have trembled; but I was calm and collected. He, feverish and dangerous.

"You received my note?"

"Yes; and have come here, as you requested."

"You of course know, Mr. Kenneth, that I have refused to reveal the circumstances connected with the death of Mary Ware? I wished to make the confession to you alone."

"Well?"

"But even to you I will assign no reason for the course I pursued. It was necessary that Mary Ware should die."

"Well?"

"I decided that she should die in her chamber, and to that end I purloined her night-key.

"On Friday night after she had gone to the theatre, I entered the hall-door by means of the key, and stole unobserved to her room, where I secreted myself under the bed, or in that small clothes-press near the stove — I forget which. Sometime between eleven and twelve o'clock Mary Ware returned. While she was in the act of lighting the gas, I pressed a handkerchief, saturated with chloroform, over her mouth. You know the effect of chloroform? I will, at this point spare you further detail, merely remarking that I threw my gloves and the handkerchief in the stove; but I'm afraid there was not fire enough to consume them."

Kenneth walked up and down the cell greatly agitated; then seated himself on the foot of the bed.

"Curse you!"

"I extinguished the light, and proceeded to make my escape from the room, which I did in a manner so simple that the detectives, through their desire to ferret out wonderful things, will never discover it, unless, indeed, you betray me. The night, you will recollect, was foggy; it was impossible to discern an object at four yards distance — this was fortunate for me. I raised the window-

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sash and let myself out cautiously, holding on by the sill, until my feet touched on the moulding which caps the window below. I then drew down the sash. By standing on the extreme left of the cornice, I was able to reach the tin water-spout of the adjacent building, and by that I descended to the sidewalk."

The man glowered at me like a tiger, his eyes green and golden with excitement: I have since wondered that he did not tear me to pieces.

"On gaining the street," I continued coolly, "I found that I had brought the knife with me. It should have been left in the chamber — it would have given the whole thing the aspect of suicide. It was too late to repair the blunder, so I threw the knife —"

"Into the river!" exclaimed Kenneth, involuntarily.

And then I smiled.

"How did you know it was I!" he shrieked.

"Hush! they will overhear you in the corridor. It was as plain as day. I knew it before I had been five minutes in the room. First, because you shrank instinctively from the corpse, though you seemed to be caressing it. Secondly, when I looked into the stove, I saw a glove and handkerchief, partly consumed; and then I instantly accounted for the faint close smell which had affected me before the room was ventilated. It was chloroform. Thirdly, when I went to open the window, I noticed that the paint was scraped off the brackets which held the spout to the next house. This conduit had been newly painted two days previously — I watched the man at work; the paint on the brackets was thicker than anywhere else, and had not dried. On looking at your feet, which I did critically, while speaking to you, I saw that the leather on the inner side of each boot was slightly chafed, paint-marked. It is a way of mine to put this and that together!"

"If you intend to betray me —"

"Oh, no, but I don't, or I should not be here — alone with you. I am, as you may allow, not quite a fool."

"Indeed, sir, you are as subtle as —"

"Yes, I wouldn't mention him."

"Who?"

"The devil."

Kenneth mused.

"May I ask, Mr. Lynde, what you intend to do?"

"Certainly — remain here."

"I don't understand you," said Kenneth with an air of perplexity.

"If you will listen patiently, you shall learn why I have acknowledged the deed, why I would bear the penalty. I believe there are vast, intense sensations from which we are excluded, by the conventional fear of a certain kind of death. Now, this pleasure, this ecstacy, this something, I don't know what, which I have striven for all my days, is known only to a privileged few — innocent men, who, through some oversight of the law, are hanged by the neck! How

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rich is Nature in compensations! Some men are born to be hanged, some have hanging thrust upon them, and some (as I hope to do) achieve hanging. It appears ages since I commenced watching for an opportunity like this. Worlds could not tempt me to divulge your guilt, nor could worlds have tempted me to commit your crime, for a man's conscience should be at ease to enjoy, to the utmost, this delicious death! Our interview is at an end, Mr. Kenneth. I held it my duty to say this much to you."

And I turned my back on him.

"One word, Mr. Lynde."

Kenneth came to my side and laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, that red right hand, which all the tears of the angels cannot make white again.

As he stood there, his face suddenly grew so familiar to me — yet so vaguely familiar — that I started. It seemed as if I had seen such a face, somewhere, in my dreams, hundreds of years ago. The face in the grate.

"Did you send this to me last month?" asked Kenneth, holding up a slip of paper on which was scrawled *Watch them* — in my handwriting.

"Yes," I answered.

Then it struck me that these two thoughtless words, which some sinister spirit had impelled me to write, were the indirect cause of the whole catastrophe.

"Thank you," he said hurriedly. "I watched them!" Then, after a pause, "I shall go far from here. I cannot, I will not die yet. Mary was to have been my wife, so she would have hidden her shame — Oh cruel! she, my own cousin, and we the last two of our race! Life is not sweet to me, it is bitter, bitter; but I shall live until I stand front to front with him. And you? They will not harm you — you are a madman!"

Julius Kenneth was gone before I could reply. The cell-door shut him out forever — shut him out in the flesh. His spirit was not so easily exorcised.

After all, it was a wretched fiasco. Two officious friends of mine, who had played chess with me at my lodgings on the night of the 3rd, proved an alibi; and I was literally turned out of the Tombs; for I insisted on being executed.

Then it was maddening to have the newspapers call me a monomaniac.

I a monomaniac?

What was Pythagoras, Newton, Fulton? Have not the great original lights of every age been regarded as madmen? Science, like religion, has its martyrs.

Recent surgical discoveries have, I believe, sustained me in my theory; or, if not, they ought to have done so. There is said to be a pleasure in drowning. Why not in strangulation?

In another field of science I shall probably have full justice awarded me — I now allude to the Moon-Apparatus, which is still in an unfinished state, but progressing.

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COLLARED

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

I KNEW something was up, because he came in nervous instead of just plain lit. He'd had his usual liquid transfusion, but his cooling system must have jammed; it wasn't taking.

He didn't bother looking at me. Me — last year's moll, left-over around the place. I was just a part of the furniture. That was his mistake. Chairs don't stand around waiting to get even on you.

The first six months or so I'd tried to run out on him, but I always got brought back feet first, and I usually had to have a new porcelain cap put on a tooth or two right afterwards. Since then things had changed. Now he was sick of me, but he couldn't get rid of me for love nor money. I was staying until I could get something on him.

He started dialing a number the minute he came in the door, before he even took his hat off. When he wanted a number that fast and that early — five in the morning — it couldn't be anyone's but his mouth's. So that meant he was in a jam.

I couldn't read the slots as he spun them, because he was out in the hall and I was inside at the mirror fiddling with my nails, but I could tell by the length of time the dial took slipping back each time about which ones they were. The first three were short turns — the exchange and its subdivision. The next two were long hauls — the end slot. His mouth's private number began with two zeros; that was it all right. Then he changed his mind, hung up instead of going ahead. So that meant he wasn't sure whether he was in a jam or not; he'd just done something that worried him and was afraid he might be.

He came in instead, stiff-armed me by the shoulder, twisted me around his way so I nearly broke in two, and blew a lot of expensive Cutty Sark in my face for an atomizer. "Listen, Last Year," he said. "I been here with you from about three on, get that? I been here with you from the time I left the club."

"You been here from three on," I repeated. I had more porcelain caps than I could carry now. He was bending over me and I couldn't help seeing his collar.

"She's got the damnedest aim," I remarked. "Why don't you hold still when you're leaving her, so you get it on the kisser and not the Cluett Peabody?"

He yanked the collar off so hard and fast his whole tie stayed on around his neck. He looked at it kind of scared, and blew out a little breath, as though he were relieved I'd spotted it for him in time. He went into the bathroom. I

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heard a match scratch and I saw flame reflected against the tiles. I got a whiff of scorched linen, and then a lot of water ran down. He'd burned it.

That gave me a hint about what the jam was. He'd done something to her, whoever she was. Because he certainly hadn't got rid of it on my account. He'd brought those same lipstick trademarks back with him before, and it hadn't bothered him whether I saw them or not. They wouldn't come out in the wash, I'd found that out; it was waterproof rouge and they just went a little lighter.

And if it bothered him, that meant he hadn't meant to do it, whatever *it* was. Because what was a little kill to him? If he'd cut notches in a stick he'd have had a buzz-saw by now. But he always had it done by remote control, and this was one time he'd been very much all there, judging by his collar; that made a difference. That alone was positive proof to me that it was unintentional.

The way I figured it, one of two things had happened. Either he'd found out something, lost his head for a minute, and couldn't control his trigger-finger in time, and now he regretted it; or it had been altogether an accident. Maybe she was one of those dumb twists that just had to fool with his gun to kill time between huddles, and had playfully pulled the trigger.

Either way it looked like my long-delayed payoff was coming up. So I just sat where I was and rubbed cold cream into my map as an excuse for staying up, to get all the dope I could. He came out again, collar gone now, and massaged the back of his neck. That meant he was trying to figure out whether to let the jam ride and take a chance on getting away with it, or do something to straighten it out.

He took off his coat and vest, and took a .32 out of one of the pockets. He took a sniff at the bore, and then tapped it against the palm of his hand a couple of times, worried. That wasn't his gun; he would have used a caliber like that to pick his teeth with.

Finally he went out to the phone again, and dialed a different number, without any zeros. "Louie," he said in a low voice. "I want you to come over here and do something for me."

Louie made it fast. But that's all he was geared for anyway, just one of his stooges. He brought him into the room with him. I was working on my neck now.

Louie said, "H'lo, Mae," just to stay in good with Buck, not knowing for sure if I'd been scratched yet.

"Never mind her," Buck said, letting him know I had. He gave me a traffic signal toward the bathroom with his thumb. "G'wan, get inside there and swaller some iodine or something until I tell you to come out again. And keep that door closed."

I missed some of it that way, but not for lack of pushing my ear hard enough against the door seam. His voice rose irritably every once in a while, which was a habit of his when-

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ever he was talking to his stooges, and that helped some.

"Naw, no one heard it and no one saw it, or I woulda gotten Mendes on the wire right off," was the first thing I got, after a minute or two of static. Mendes was his mouthpiece.

More poor reception, and then: "Why didn't I leave it there? Suppose it *was* hers! Don't you think they're gonna know someone was up there, you dumb lug? Her wrist was weaker than I thought it would be; I pushed it all the way back over her shoulder, and it hit something, turned aside, and the bullet went into her from the back!"

More interference, and then: "I wouldn't wanna pass it off like that even if I could. I didn't want to lose the kid, even after what I found out. I was just gonna slap her around a few times. I got somebody lined up for it. No one takes anything away from me without paying for it!"

A name was coming up. I shifted down to the keyhole, where the reception was better.

"The boy friend's name is Frank Rogers; I got that much out of her before it happened. He came on here to take her back to her home town, when they'd heard she was getting in wrong. He's at the Hallerton House, one of these men's hotels. You know how to work it. Put a little vaseline on the gun, but see that you've got on gloves yourself. You be looking it over just as he comes along — in the hall outside his room, for instance. You drop the gun and it lands on one of your pet corns. You grab your foot with both hands and hop around, so you've got an excuse for not picking it up yourself. He'll bend down and hand it back to you without thinking twice — any guy would. Then just keep it well wrapped up after that, so it don't catch cold."

Some low-pitched beefing I couldn't catch came in from Louie at this point. Then Buck overrode him: "What you worrying about? You don't have to go in there with her, you yellow belly. The body's safe until ten; the woman that does her cleaning don't come around before then. Just see that you leave the gun around inside the building some place where the cops can't miss it, like he threw it away on the lam. Now get over there fast. He'll be getting up early; he was figuring on taking her back with him on the early-morning bus. The six o'clock one. So hurry."

I heard the outside door slam, I counted ten, and then I drifted out. "We're kind of low on iodine in there," I said meekly. "Should I have used a razor?"

He fired his shoe at me. It missed my head but busted the mirror. "Have a little bad luck on me," he wished fervently.

There were still enough pieces left in the mirror's frame to do piecework by, so I sat down at it again, for a stall to stay awake longer than him. He put on a pair of pajamas with zebra stripes. The last thing he said was, "You may as well quit that; it's not gonna get you anything — even

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in the dark." His yap dropped open and he started to breathe heavy.

I took another halfturn on the cold cream, to make sure he was asleep. I kept thinking, "I gotta find out who she is. Was, I mean. This is what I been waiting for for six months. This is my chance to fix him good, and if I pass it up it'll never come again, he's too cagy. I've got the fall guy's name. Frank Rogers. But I gotta find out hers, and especially where she's lying dead right now." Then a short cut occurred to me. "What the hell, this Rogers can tell me who and where she is."

I had to work fast, but I had to work carefully too. One wrong move and I knew what my finish would be. And it wouldn't be just another busted tooth this time either. He or some one of his gang would kill me. That was why there was no question of just anonymously ratting on Buck to the cops. I had to stay out of it altogether. They had to trace it back to him themselves. I had to find some way of making sure they did — and leave me in the clear, on the sidelines, when they did. Even with him in the death house, my life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel if there was a leak afterwards.

I wouldn't call it a frame. There was once a guy named Gordon, may his good soul rest in peace. . . . Never mind that now.

I didn't have much time. Those stooges of Buck's moved fast when they were on his shift. That Louie must be practically at Rogers' hotel by now. Here goes, I thought, and I tiptoed out to the phone, keeping my face turned his way so I could do a quick right-about-face if his eyes opened.

The dial made an awful clack. I tried to bury it against my chest, but it wouldn't go around then. Finally I muffled it all I could by keeping my finger in the slot on the return trip each time, but I expected to feel a slug in the back of my neck any minute.

"Get me Mr. Frank Rogers and get him fast," I said to the hotel clerk under my breath. They got him fast but not fast enough to suit me. He sounded sleepy too, must have just got up. Which was another bad break; it would have been bad enough talking to someone wide-awake.

I began: "I haven't time to repeat what I'm going to say a second time, so don't ask me to, get it the first. I've got a message for you from your girl friend."

"Alma?" he said, surprised.

That was only one-third of what I needed. "To make sure I've got the right party, kick back with her full name and address. There may be another Frank Rogers in the same building."

He fell for it. "Alma Kitteredge, 832 East Seventy-second. What's the message?"

"Just put on your pants and pull out of town fast. She's not coming with you, you'll find out why when you get back home. Buy a two-cent paper and shut up about this call."

I was going to warn him not to touch anything, not to pick up any

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guns for any strangers, but before I had time I had to hang up. Buck had just changed sides in the hay. "What are you doing out there?" he growled.

"Just bringing in the morning paper, dee-yur."

It hadn't come yet, but he was asleep again by then anyway.

I made a quick round-trip to the closet, grabbed up whatever was handiest, and got dressed out there in the foyer on the installment plan, stopping between each layer to see if I was still in the clear. I put on my checker-board swagger-coat. Black and white plaid; you could see it a mile away even with low visibility, but it had been on the end hanger. I wasn't heading for an Easter parade, anyway.

The last thing I took was a clean collar of his, rolled it up small, and put it in my handbag. Then I edged over and fished his key holder out of his vest-pocket. He had an awful lot of them, but only three Yales. I stepped outside and found out which was the one to our place, and that left only two. One probably to his office at the gambling club, and the other one to her place. I detached both of them and took them with me.

I eased the door closed after me, and then I hot-footed it down to the street, scared up a cab, and gave Alma's address. I hadn't been out this early in the morning since I was a good girl in love with an honest guy.

I had the driver let me off on the corner instead of right outside the door. It wasn't such a hot place. None of the trimmings. No doorman, nothing. I could tell Buck hadn't picked it for her. Still, he already had the key. She'd been afraid to refuse it to him, I guess. Just like I'd been before Gordon had his "accident."

The door key opened the street door too. The mail slot said 3-A. I walked up a couple of flights of stairs and found the door, a little to the left. I didn't knock. I knew there was no one in there to hear me any more. The key I'd taken from Buck worked the door without any trouble, and I closed it quietly after me with a back-hand motion. The lights had been left on.

She had it nice inside. But she was spoiling the looks of it, even though she was a pretty little thing, lying slopped all over the floor like that.

I looked down at her. "Cheer up, kid," I said softly. "He'll get it hung on him, don't worry."

I went in to her dressing table, rummaged, and got out her lipstick. It was waterproof rouge. I took it back to where she was, bent down by her, lifted her head, and reddened up her mouth plenty. When I'd put it on so thick that it was practically caked on her, I picked up her hand and closed her fingers tight around the lipstick holder.

"Just so the dicks'll know what you were trying to tell them," I murmured to her. "If they don't think it funny that a girl dying from a slug takes time out to rouge her lips, they oughta be out shoving street cleaners' tea wagons around. Now spread your-

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self on this." I unrolled his clean collar, held it out straight by both ends, and pressed it hard against her smeared mouth. The print came out perfect, a complete cupid's bow.

"They'll check the rouge, they'll check the shape of your mouth. Oh, they'll know," I promised her softly. I rolled the collar up carefully again, put a little tissue paper around it so it wouldn't blur, put it back in my handbag.

"Now just so they'll know what to look for it on. . . ." I said. I went over to the table and picked up a big glossy magazine lying there. I thumbed through the ads until I came to a full-page men's collar ad, with a handsome he-model illustrating it. "Here you go," I said. I held that against her mouth, so that the print came out on the collar in the photograph just about where it had on Buck's. Then I dropped the mag on the floor near her, open at that particular page.

"Now if the cops are any good at all, that oughta bring them around where I live sooner or later — without me having to be filled full of buckshot for it either." I looked back at her from the door, saluted her sadly. "Take it easy, Toots. And the next time you live, marry your Frank Rogers fast and don't fool around with dynamite."

I had my hand on the door knob ready to leave when I heard someone outside in the hall. A sort of tiptoey tread, the kind you notice all the quicker just because it's trying not to be heard. I knew it was Louie, with his little gun all neatly fingerprinted now by Rogers. Louie must have come up through the basement, because I had Buck's key. I got good and scared. I didn't stop to think what a wonderful break I'd just had; if I'd left a minute sooner I'd have run into him head-on on the stairs. Or if he'd shown up a minute later. I was all right where I was. He was too yellow to come in here, and he didn't have the key anyway.

The sound of his tiptoeing went down the hall to the back. There was a muffled clunk from a tin bucket, then his steps came back again, passed the door where I was holding my breath, and faded out down the stairs.

I gave him all the time he needed to get out of the building. Then I let myself out, closed her door, and went up there to the end of the hall. There was a fire-ax clamped to the wall, and there was a red fire-bucket on the floor under it. The gun was lying at the bottom of it.

I'd seen Buck clean his often enough. He always used a piece of chamois or kidskin. Of course this was different; this was to get prints off, but I figured the same thing would work. I took one of my own gloves, from my handbag, to it. That, and my breath, and — what a lady spits with. I worked until there couldn't have been anything left on it. Then I laid it down again inside the pail.

I took a couple of swabs at the outside door knob too, just for luck, before I left. Not that I was particularly worried about myself, but just

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not to cloud the issue. The whole job must have taken about five, six minutes. Then I went downstairs and out of the building, and stood there for a half-minute outside the street door — like a fool, but the way anyone's apt to do. Sort of taking a deep breath after finishing something. It was still early but it was good and light by now.

You know how you can feel it when anyone's looking at you hard, even from a distance? Something pulled my head around in the opposite direction, and there was a figure in a light gray suit down at the next corner, on the other side of the street, sizing me up for all he was worth. It was Louie, same suit he'd just had on up at our place; he'd just come out of a cigar store that he'd gone into either to buy smokes or to report his success back to Buck over the wire.

My first thought was, "Take it easy. He can't tell who you are from that far off." Then I looked down at myself and I saw those checker-board black and white squares all over me. "Oh, Lord!" I gasped, and I stepped down from the doorway fast and went up the other way.

The steady way he'd been staring told me he already had a hunch it was me. And I knew what the next step would be. He'd phone back to Buck fast to see if I was there or not.

I jumped into the first cab I saw and I almost shook the driver by the shoulders to get some speed out of him. "Fast!" I kept whimpering. "Fast! I've got to beat a phone call."

"I don't see how it can be done," he said.

I didn't either, but it had to be. If Louie had only wasted time tailing me around to where I'd hopped the cab. . . . If he'd only run out of nickels. . . .

But if he'd already phoned Buck the first time and woken him up, then what was the use of all this? I was already finished. I threw something at the driver; I think it was a fin for a six-bit ride, and I never got up to a third floor so fast before or after.

It was ringing away, I could hear it right through the door while I was trying to get it open. And of course I would drop the key on the floor in my hurry and have to dredge for it. I don't know how I did it but finally I was in and had the damned thing at my mouth and ear, just as Buck came up for air in the other room and growled, "Are you gonna get a move on and shut that damn thing up or d'ya want a ride on the end of my foot?"

It was Louie, all right. "Who's that — *Mae?*" he said. He acted surprised I was there. So was I.

"Sure, who else?" I couldn't say much, I was too winded.

"I got three wrong numbers in a row, can y'imagine?" I thanked God and the Telephone Company. "I coulda sworn I seen you down on Seventy-second Street just now."

"Whaddya think I do, walk in my sleep?"

"Well, this dame beat it away fast."

"She probably got a look at your

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face. Listen, get through, will you? You just busted a dream Charles Boyer was in with me."

"Just tell Buck: Okay." He hung up. I got undressed right where I was standing, on the zipper plan; just dropped everything off together and stepped out of them. But he was asleep again, he didn't ask who it was.

I got her door key and the other one back into his pocket. I hung that blasted checker-board coat as far back inside the closet as it would go, and made a mental note to sell it to the first old-clothes man that came around. The collar with her death kiss on it I rolled up at the bottom of the laundry bag.

The rest was up to the dicks.

They didn't show up for three days. Three days that were like three years. It was in the papers the first day, just a little squib. Not a word about the lipstick in her hand or the smear on the magazine. That gave me a bad jolt. Had they muffed it? There was always the possibility that Louie had gone back inside, after he'd thought he'd seen me leave there that day, and rearranged my carefully planted setup. But if he had, I'd have been dead two days already.

What looked good about it was that, although the papers spoke of their sending upstate to have a Frank Rogers held and questioned, there was no follow-up. It stopped at that. The next editions didn't say a word about his being brought back under arrest. His alibi must have held up. It should have, it was the straight goods.

The bureau drawer gave a crash at this point that was enough to split it in two, so I quickly dropped the paper. This was Thursday night, the second night after, around eight, Buck's usual time for getting caked up to go down to the club. He was standing there across the room in suspenders, holster, and stiff shirt, but with a bare neck. "Well?" he growled. "What do I use for a collar? They've run out on me."

My heart started hitting it up. "Ur-um-uff," I said.

A shoe horn went past my left ear and a lit cigar butt sailed by my right. He didn't wait to see if he'd hit me or not; he headed straight over for that laundry bag behind the bath door. "Now I'll hafta use the same one twice!"

I managed to stay on my feet, but I was dying all over by inches as I saw his arm go down into it, scuffing things out. "Wait, hon," I moaned. "Getcha nice fresh one at the haberdasher downstairs. Won't take a minute, they're still open." I got the door open.

It worked. He quit burrowing, with his fingertips just an inch away from it by that time. "Well, get some life into your bustle, I gotta get down there."

It was right in our same building, but you had to go out the street door and around to get into it. I was too frightened even to remember his size. I bought one of every half-size they carried, from fourteen up to seven-

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teen, to make sure of hitting the right one, and charged them. It was only when I ducked back into the house door again and saw people stopping dead and staring, that I realized I had on bell-bottomed pajamas and a brassier. It was better than a shroud, at that.

He let me off easy, just pushed me back over the arm of a chair. It stayed up, so I did too. He hadn't fished up what lay curled at the bottom of the laundry bag and that was all that mattered.

That was Thursday.

Friday lasted 96 hours, but it finally ended. I kept worrying Rogers had spilled it that an anonymous woman had tipped him to get out of town. If that leaked, and it got back to Buck!

Friday night I got a sudden phone call from Buck, from the club, at two in the morning. He never did that any more; he would have been only too glad if I'd tried to cheat on him those days, so he could've tied the can to me.

I knew what it was, before he even said anything. They were on the trail at last. They must have just been over there to talk to him, for the first time. He was phoning to warn me ahead.

"Anyone been around?" he asked mysteriously.

"No."

"In case anyone does, remember what I told you Tuesday night?"

"That was the night you came home early from the club, at three."

I didn't get any thanks for it. "Now listen, Last Year, if anything gets gummed, if there's any slip-up, I'm going to know just who's to blame for it. You better wish you'd never been born."

He was right; I was probably his only alibi, from the moment he had left the club that night. That may sound as if it was bad for him, but I was the one it was bad for. He could always get out of it in the end, he'd got out of worse ones, and in this case there was the printed gun (so he thought!) and no witnesses. But if there was the least hitch, if he was questioned once too often or half an hour too long, he'd know the answer. That was curtains for me; there was no one else I could pass the buck to.

He'd hardly rung off than there was a knock on the door. I knew who it was. I knew I was going to have to handle the interview just as though Buck was present, or listening in the next room. That didn't have me stopped. If they had any brains at all, maybe they could get it from what I didn't say, instead of what I did.

But when I'd opened the door, it was only one guy. "Headquarters," he said, and he tipped his hat and showed his badge. Only strangers tipped their hats to me any more, not the guys I associated with. "Are you Buck Colby's wife?"

"Common law." Buck didn't even refer to me as that.

"Come in and talk to you?"

"Why, sure," I said hospitably. "Help yourself."

He looked around him casually.

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Suddenly he'd said, "About what time does Colby get back here at nights as a rule?" It was out and waiting to be answered before I'd even heard it coming. I was supposed to think he wanted to see Buck right now and wondered how long he'd have to wait for him.

"Never much before three. He's kept busy at the cl —"

He cut it short with his hand. "How about after?"

"Seldom after, either."

"Take Tuesday, for instance." They were coming faster now.

"Tuesday was one of his early nights. He was here at three to the dot."

"References?"

"You picked an easy one for me to remember." I thumbed the busted mirror. "I was still sitting up there when he came in. If it had been any later than three I would have been in bed. And as a matter of fact, I remember asking him, 'What brings you home so early?' He said the take had been rather thin."

"Where does that mirror come in it?"

"He was taking off his shoe, and he pulled too hard, and it flew out of his hand and landed over here." I coughed deprecatingly.

He'd shut up all of a sudden. He kept looking at me as if he found me kind of interesting, all at once. The next time he spoke, it wasn't a police question any more, it was more personal. "Been — married to him long?"

I slid my mouth around toward my left ear. "I've been with Mr. Colby two years now." It sounded strangely sweet, coming out of such a bitter-shaped thing.

He was getting more and more interested in me personally, seemed to forget all about what had brought him up here. Seemed to. "Worked in one of his clubs, I guess, in the beginning?"

"No. Mr. Colby *did* urge me to when he first met me. But I was intending getting married at the time, so I didn't feel free to accept. However, the party I — uh, had figured on marrying had an accident, and that left me much freer to accept, so I did."

He looked at me. "Had an accident," he said without any question mark.

"Yes. A rather large beer truck ran wild down a hill near where I was living and crushed him against a cement wall as he was on his way up to see me. I suppose even the first time would have killed him, but every time the frightened driver tried to reverse and extricate his vehicle, it would only back up a little and then go smashing in again. It happened three or four times. Like a sort of battering ram.

"The funny part of it was he never fell down. He stayed sort of stuck to the wall — partly. And partly to the fender and radiator. He even got all over the engine too, I understand. They had to whitewash the wall and scour the sidewalk with creosote.

"The driver felt very bad about it.

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It preyed on his mind, until a few months later he took his own life by tying his hands to his feet and jumping into the river. I don't believe anyone remembered who he was by that time any more. I happened to, of course, but that was all. No one was to blame, you understand. How could they be?" I chewed the lining of my cheek and made my eyes hard as marbles. "*No one was to blame.*"

He just looked at me. After a while he said quietly, "Thought a lot of him, didn't you?"

I let my eyes drift. "There was never any very great — feeling between us, compared to what there is between Mr. Colby and myself now." I took my lower jaw and shifted it tenderly back and forth, as if to see whether it had been fractured or not lately.

He shook his head half pityingly and looked down at the floor. Finally he said, as if winding up the interview: "Then he was here from three o'clock on, Tuesday night?"

"From three on. *I stake my life on that.*"

He shuttered his eyes at me understandingly, as if to say, "I guess you do." He got up. "I'm going to ask you to let me take a look in your laundry bag before I go."

I shifted my eyes over to the bath door, then back to him again. "That's a very strange request," I said primly. "I can't imagine what possible —"

He went over to it while I was still talking, stuck his arm down into it, and pulled the bottom up through the top without anything falling out. "Empty," he said.

"I take it out on Mondays as a rule, but this week, for *some* reason —" I looked at him hard — "I put it off until just yesterday. Just yesterday Mr. Colby noticed it was rather full, and reminded me I hadn't taken it out." I rubbed my shoulder as though it still ached. "I can't imagine what made me so absent-minded. If he hadn't called my attention to it, it would have been still here." Our eyes met.

He'd sat down again. I said, in my best tea-table manner, "Will you excuse me while I get a cigarette?" He held out a leather case from his pocket. I ignored it. He raised the lid of a box standing there right beside me, full. I didn't seem to see him do it. I got my handbag and brought it back and dug out a crumpled pack. A little vivid green tab of paper came up with it "accidentally" and slipped to the floor. It had two ink-brush ideographs on it, and a couple of words of English — the laundry's name and location.

He picked it up for me, looked at it, and handed it back. I put it back in my bag and put my bag back where I'd got it. The cigarette wouldn't draw, was split from being battered around so much; it didn't matter, I seemed to have got over wanting a smoke any more by that time.

He hitched his chair closer, dropped his voice until you could hardly hear it. Nine parts lip motion to one part of vocal sound. "Temple's my name.

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Why don't you come down and see me, if you're leery about talking up here? We'll give you protection."

I clasped my hands in hasty, agonized entreaty, separated them again.. "I beg your pardon?" I said in a clear, ringing voice. "Did you say something just then?"

"Take a walk, buddy!" Buck was standing there in the open doorway, Louie looking over his shoulder. I put on a great big relieved expression, like I was sure glad they'd finally shown up. Buck came on in, with his lower jaw leading the way by two inches.

"Now listen, you questioned me at my club oilier tonight, and I took it good-natured. I soitainly never expected to find you here half an hour later. How long does this keep up?"

"What does he want, hon?" I said with wide-eyed innocence. I could have saved myself the trouble, he didn't even give me a tumble.

"Now if ya think ya got anything on me, out with it, and I'll go anywheres you say and face it! If ya haven't, there's the way out and don't lemme see ya around here again."

This Temple dick took it meeker than I thought he would. He got up and went toward the door. He went slow, but he went.

"Nothing to get sore about," he drawled mildly. "I'm just doing my job. No one said anything about having anything on you."

"You bet no one did!" Buck blared, and slammed the door on him.

None of us said anything for a few minutes. Then Louie looked out to make sure he'd gone, and Buck opened up.

"Y'did better than I expected, at that," he said to me. "It's a good thing for you y'did." He tapped his side meaningfully. "I heard the whole thing from outside the door. We been out there for the past ten minutes. There's only one thing I don't like about it. What did he want with that laundry bag?" He poured himself a shot, wiped the dew away on his sleeve. "I don't get it. I burned —" He didn't finish it. "How did he know? How did he get onto that?"

He came over at me and his finger shot out like a knife. "Hey, you!" I nearly died in the split-second before he came out with the rest of it. "Did you take any collars over with the rest of that stuff yesterday?"

"I don't think there were any," I mumbled vaguely.

"Yes or no?"

My next answer came from the other side of the room, where he'd kited me. "No," I groaned through a constellation of stars. "They were frayed so I —"

"Just the same you get over there the minute that place opens up in the morning and get that stuff back here, hear me? If they want it, then I want it twice as bad."

"Sure, Buck," I said, wiping the blood off my lip. "I'll bring it back."

"Why you so worried about collars?" Louie asked him, puzzled.

Buck explained in an undertone, "She's been kissing me on the neck

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and I been finding lip-rouge on 'em when I got home. That's the only thing I can figure he's looking for. I burned one but there may be others."

"Yeah, but how would they know?" said Louie with unanswerable logic. "You brought the marks back with you, they didn't stay down there with *her*."

His face had a look like something was within an inch of clicking behind it, and I knew what that something was: A loud checked coat leaving a dead girl's doorway only a few minutes after he had the other day. If it's possible to shrink inside your own skin and take up lots less room than before, I shrank. That fool Temple, I thought, he may have killed me by making that pass at the laundry bag.

But before the chain of thought Louie was working on could click, Buck saved me by cutting across it and distracting his attention. "There's something ain't working right. I don't know why they haven't jumped you-know-who by now. They went up and questioned him all right, but I notice there ain't been a word printed about their bringing him back with them. He musta sprung an alibi that held up. Put your ear down to the ground and find out what's up, for me, Louie. You got ways. If it don't move, looks like we'll have to put a flea in their ear about —" He pressed his fingertips down hard on the table to show him what he meant.

He was standing over me shaking me at seven-thirty the next morning. And when Buck shook you, you shook. "G'wan, get over there like I told you and get that wash back. I don't care if it ain't ironed or ain't even washed yet, don't come back here without it!"

The owner's name was Lee. It was just about a block away, down in a basement. They were up already, three of the little fellows, ironing away a mile a minute; they must have lived in the back of the place. I tottered down from the street level, put the bright green wash ticket down on the counter.

I thought he looked at me kind of funny. He got it down from the shelf, done up flat in brown paper. "Two dolla' fi' cents," he said. He kept looking at me funny even after I paid him. The other two had quit pounding their flat-irons, were acting funny too. Not looking at me, but sort of waiting for something to happen. I had an idea they were dying to tell me something, but didn't have the nerve.

I started to pick up the flat package to walk out with it, and it wouldn't move, stayed on the counter. A hand was holding it down. The string popped, the brown paper rattled open. I didn't bother turning my head. Like the three monkeys: see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. I kept watching the sidewalk level outside the shop, murmuring "Thank God!" over and over.

Behind me, a voice said quietly, "Tie the lady's bundle up again, John."

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I breathed, "Don't take too long, will you?" I didn't mean it for the laundryman, I hoped he knew that.

Temple knew everything. "Want to stay out?" he said softly. "I'll cover you."

"You'll cover me with a rubber bib at the morgue. Sure I want to stay out — out of it."

"I've got a look-out posted."

"Can he beat a slug's time into my girlish waist?" I wanted to know.

"If you need help before the lab checks this collar, lower one of the window shades."

"That'd be about right. Lower one of the window shades, like when there's been a death in the house."

Somebody wedged the retied bundle under my arm, the laundryman I guess, and I walked on out and up the steps. Ostrich-like, I hadn't seen Temple from first to last. I could be beaten to death, but I couldn't truthfully say I'd seen him.

It gave me a funny feeling when I got back outside our place again. There should have been a sign over the door, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here."

That had been my last chance to lam, when I was sent out for that laundry. But I knew enough not to. It would have been a dead give-away, and meant certain death. When they want to get you, not all the protection of all the dicks in town is any good to you. The only way for me to play it was this: They mustn't find out anything that would make them want to get me. So in I went.

He was pacing up and down the room a mile a minute. He turned on me and grabbed the package and slapped me back away from it. "What took you so long?" he griped.

"I hadda wait for them to show up and lemme in."

He busted it wide open, rummaged through it, scattering it all over the place. Not a collar turned up. "Whew!" he said, and slid his finger across his forehead and flicked it off in the air. Then he thought it over. "But just the same he was after *something* in here. Let's see if it coulda been anything else."

He turned the wrapping paper over and before my glazing eyes yanked a bright green price list out from under it. You get one back with every package, a check list of what they're charging you for. I'd seen too many of them before, I knew just what was going to be on it: 1 collar — 5c. With no collar present to match it. We'd both overlooked that, me and that voice back at the laundry.

"Eight shirts," he mumbled, "all here. Six shorts."

I could feel my cheeks puffing in and out like bellows. I reached down and hung onto the nearest piece of furniture, to brace myself for it when it came. He'd hit it in about a second more.

The phone rang. He dropped the laundry bill and went out to get it. I kind of swayed where I was. I couldn't move fast, my knees were all watery. But luckily the party seemed to have a lot to say, held him out there

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long enough for me to pull myself together.

I got over to where his coat was hanging, across the back of a chair, and unclasped a pencil with a rubber on it. Then I staggered to where the laundry slip was, and rubbed out the pencilled "1" in front of the printed word collars and the pencilled "5¢" after it. Then I floundered into a chair, and finally got my stomach down where it belonged again.

He came in and finished up what he'd been doing. The list was badly wrinkled and that had covered the erasure. "Everything accounted for," he said. "He overcharged me five cents, but the hell with that." He wasn't a tightwad. Just a killer. "Whatever that dirty name was after, he didn't get."

He hauled a cowhide valise out into the middle of the room. He thumbed it, and then me. "Start packing," he said. "We're getting out of here. I don't like the way that dope sounded just now."

So that had been Louie who'd called just now. Well, I didn't like it either, any more than he did, but not for the same reasons. The lab would never kick back with its report on that collar in time to keep them from hauling me off out of reach with them. Temple would never be able to get to me once they took me out of here with them. And it was no good trying to stall either.

"Come on, yuh paralyzed?" he said, and gave me a shove. "Get a move on."

Damn it, if I'd only emptied the closet first, while we were still alone in the place, and the bureau drawers later! But he kept cracking the whip over my head and I didn't have time to think straight. I emptied out the drawers first, and before I'd got around to the clothes closet, Louie was already in the place. Even then, I was so busy listening to the two of them while I hauled things back and forth that I forgot for a minute what was in that closet. Didn't realize what I was going to be in for, in just one more round trip.

"What'd you mean just now, it's gone sour?" Buck was demanding.

"The gun turned up clean."

Pokk!

"Don't sock me!" Louie shrilled. "I done my part! Rogers wrapped his mitts around it right under my own eyes! Picked it up and handed it back to me. Somebody musta tampered with it after I planted it."

I unslung a half-dozen dresses from the rack, and suddenly black and white checks were glaring malevolently at me from the depths of the closet! A chair creaked, and Louie had slumped down in one right on a line with the closet door, rubbing the side of his face where Buck had caught him. I knew I'd never be able to get it out of there without him seeing it, not even if I tried to cover it over with the dresses. It was such a big bulky thing.

"It's got to stay in there where it is," I heaved terrifiedly to myself. "That's my only chance."

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I sidled out with the dresses, and gave the closet door a little nudge behind me with the point of my elbow, to close it more than it was so he couldn't see in. I didn't bend over the bags, I toppled over them from fright and weakness when I got to them.

I should have got away with it, the way they were barking at each other.

"You blundering fool! No wonder they never brought Rogers back! Mendes'll have to go to bat for me now!"

"*She* ratted on you herself!" Louie protested. For a minute I thought he meant me and a drop of twenty degrees ran down my spine. "I heard she left some kind of a high-sign, but I couldn't find out what it was; they're keeping it to themselves. They found her with something in her hand. They put the kibosh on it, wouldn't let the papers tell it. One story I heard was they're out after some guy that poses for ads in magazines, but I think it's just a bum steer they threw out on purpose. Anyway, one thing's sure, she didn't die right away like you thought."

"She was dead when I left her!" Buck growled ferociously. "I oughta know, I tried hard enough to bring her back! Somebody's framed me! C'mon, let's get out of here fast. Hurry up, you, y'got everything?"

Louie's face was working like he was trying to connect something up. "Y'know, I forgot to tell you," he started to say, "Tuesday morning early, when you sent me over there —"

"Come on, I've got everything!" I interrupted frantically. "What're we waiting for?" I picked up both valises, heavy as they were, just to break Louie's chain of thought.

"Make sure you don't leave nothing behind," Buck said. He widened the closet door to take a last look in. His voice sounded hollow, coming from inside it. "Hey, you dope, what's the matter with this coat?"

Clump went the two valises to the floor. I just stood there between them. Dead already, for all practical purposes, just waiting to fall down. I didn't even turn to look, just waited for it to come.

Buck came out holding it up by one hand, and the room was suddenly full of loud checks. Louie gave a jolt out of his chair, like a tack had run up through it.

"*That's the coat!*" he yelled. "I'd know it anywhere! That's the coat I seen come out of the Kitteredge babe's house five minutes after I left there Tuesday morning! So you wanna know who ratted on you! So you wanna know who! Ask *her* what she was doing down there. Ask *her* how the gun turned up clean. Ask *her* how the stiff come to give a high-sign when you left her dead."

"Did I answer at this end when you called up right afterwards — did I or didn't I? Tell him that!" I yelled.

"Sure — so out of breath you couldn't hardly talk at all," Louie said.

"Don't let him put a knife in me, Buck. What's he trying to tell you?"

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But I could tell by Buck's eyes I'd lost the bout already. They would have cut window glass, they were so hard.

"He wouldn't make up a thing like that," he said. "Know why? He hasn't got imagination enough. And there's not another coat like yours in town; they told you that fifty times over when you bought it."

Buck unbuttoned his topcoat, spaded his hand under his jacket, heaved once, brought out his gun, leveled it, squinted at my stomach. Gee, it was awful watching him do it, he seemed to do it so slow. He crooked his left index finger at me, kept wiggling it back and forth, and *smiling*. You had to see that smile to know how awful a smile can be.

"C'm over here and get it," he said. "You're not worth moving a step out of the way for. Come on, this way. The nearer you are, the less you feel it. This is where you came in, baby."

I picked up one foot and put it down on the outside of the valise and stayed that way, straddling it. I noticed a funny thing; I wasn't so scared any more. I wasn't as scared as I had been just before they'd found the coat. I kept thinking, "It won't take long, I won't feel it. I'll be with Gordon now, anyway."

"Not here," Louie said nervously. "What'd we go to all that trouble about the first one for if you're only gonna pull a kill, big as life, where they can't miss it?"

It was hard for Buck to put on his brakes, his blood was so hot for a kill. But Louie was talking sense, and he knew it. He put his gun away slow, even slower than he'd brought it out.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah, you're right. And she's not worth taking a rap for. We'll go up to the place in the sticks. I'll get in touch with my mouth as soon as we get up there. He can handle the Kitteredge thing easy; he's handled worse ones than that for me.

"Let's see, now; she'll start with us, but she won't get up there with us though. You and me, Louie, will have to hike it the last lap of the way in. We're going to have an accident with the car before we get there. You know that hairpin turn, where the road twists around that bluff high over the river? It always makes me nervous every time I pass that stretch of road, especially the way you drive, kind of close to the edge."

He gave another of those smiles of his, and Louie grinned back at him in answer. "That ain't far from the place," he said. "I don't mind hoofing it from there in." He thumped himself over the belt buckle. "Matter of fact, I don't get enough exercise."

"I like accidents," Buck said. He kept on smiling. "You take the bags, Louie, I'll take the body."

He linked his arm through mine, like a guy often walks with a woman. Only the hand on the end of it stayed in his coat pocket, and the coat pocket stuck into my side, hard and heavy.

"Now if you're in a hurry," he said, "if you want it fast, right away instead of later, just sing out between here and the car. It don't make any

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difference to me if you take the ride with us dead or alive. You're just short-changing yourself out of about forty minutes of life, that's all."

The shade, I kept thinking, the window shade. My signal to Temple. It was as out of reach as if it had been on the window of a house across the street. "If I've got to go, I've got to go," I said dreamily. "But won't you let me take just one last look at the town from the window? You see, I won't be seeing it again. You can keep the gun at my back; you can make sure I don't try nothing."

"Aw, let her take one last look," Louie said. "It'll hurt that much more, don't you get it? Here, I'll hold her hands behind her back, so she can't signal with them in any way, and you keep the gun on her."

They shoved me up in front of the window, keeping back out of sight behind the curtains. "Okay, Mae, say good-by," Buck laughed.

The cord was hanging in a loop in front of me but Louie had both my wrists in a vise behind me. I had a lot of clothes to wear. I could have had on almost anything that day — anything that wouldn't have done any good. But he'd hustled me out so fast to get that laundry I hadn't had time to doll up. I'd shoved into a skirt and a blouse. A blouse with a couple of big flat buttons on each side of it.

I don't know how I did it. I bet I couldn't do it over again now if I tried. The cord was hanging in a loop that rested against my chest. "Gee, it's pretty," I said, and turned a little to look up one way. "It's tough to leave it," I said, and turned again to look down the other way. I couldn't get a full loop into it, but I got it snagged around the button, which was the size of a silver dollar. He did the rest.

"C'mon, that's enough," Buck said, and he jerked me back and started to swing me around on my way to the door. The button took the cord with it and pulled it tight over my shoulder. *Whirr!* and the shade came all the way down to the bottom, so fast and hard it tore partly off the roller, creased, and wouldn't go up again.

It looked so much like an accident they didn't even tumble. He just gave me a clip on the head, and freed the cord by wrenching the button off. Then we went on out of the place and down to the street, him and me first and Louie behind us with the two bags.

If I had expected the shade stunt to get me anything, I was out of luck. The street was dead, there wasn't a soul in sight up or down the whole length of it. Buck's car was standing a few yards down from the door, where there were a couple of big fat leafy trees. He had a habit of parking it under them, to keep the sun from heating up the inside of it too much.

We went down to it and he shoved me into the back seat, climbed in next to me and pinned me into the corner with his shoulder. Louie dumped the bags in the trunk, got in and took the wheel. "So he had a

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look-out posted, did he?" I thought bitterly. "Where — over in the next county?"

We started off with kind of a thud, that didn't come from the engine. "What was that?" asked Buck.

Louie looked out and behind us. "One of the branches of that tree musta grazed the roof. I see it kind of wobbling up and down."

We rounded the corner and started out for the express highway that later on turned into the upstate road we wanted. Buck had his gun on me the whole time, through the pocket, of course. I just sat there in the corner resignedly. It was too late for anyone to horn in now. Temple's look-out had muffed it. Must have gone off to phone in the alarm just as we came out of the building.

There was more life on the avenue we were on now than on the street we lived on. Louie said suddenly, "Everybody walking along the sidewalk turns and rubbernecks after us. What's she doing?"

"Nothing," Buck told him. "I got her covered. You're just jittery, that's all." Then he glanced back through the rear insert. "Yeah, their heads are all turned staring after us!"

His face worked savagely and he brought the gun out into the open, then reburied it in my side without any pocket over it. "I don't know what ya been doin', but you're through doin' it now! Step it up," he told Louie, "and let your exhaust out, I'm going to give it to her right here in the car, ahead of the accident. She'll never come up from the river bottom again anyway, so it don't make no difference if she's got a slug in her."

He crowded me back into the corner of the seat, sort of leaned over me, to muffle it between our two bodies. My eyes got big, but I didn't let out a sound.

Over his shoulder I saw something that I knew I couldn't be seeing. A pair of legs swung down off the car roof, then a man's waist and shoulders and face came down after them, and he was hanging to the roof with both arms. He hung there like that for a minute, jockeying to find the running-board with his feet. Then he let go, went down almost out of sight, came up again, hanging onto the door handle with one hand, drawing a gun with the other.

Buck had his back turned to that side, didn't see him in time. But the man had darkened the inside of the car a little by being there like that, and Buck pulled his gun out of my side and started turning. He never had time to fire.

The guy fired once, straight into his face, and then Louie swerved, and the car threw the guy who'd shot off the running-board and he lay there behind us in the street.

Buck's head fell back into my lap, and it never moved again, just got a little blood on me. I saw Louie reaching with one hand, so I freed the gun that was still in Buck's hand, pointed it at the back of his neck, and said:

"Pull over!"

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The jolting of the car to a stop threw Buck's dead head off my lap to the floor where it belonged.

I was holding Louie there like that, hands up in the clear off the wheel, when Temple's look-out came limping after us. He was pretty badly banged up by his fall but not out of commission. He took over.

"They ought to be here any minute," he said. "I tipped off Temple as soon as I caught the shade signal, but I figured he wouldn't make it in time. That tree was a natural, for stowing myself away on the roof."

Temple and the rest caught up with us five or ten minutes later, in a screaming police car. On the way back in it with him, safely out of earshot of the handcuffed Louie, I said: "Well, what luck did you have with that collar?"

"The lab just sent in its report before I came away. It checks all right. It's just as well we got him this way, though, because we couldn't have used it anyway. Frank Rogers' testimony on the way he was tricked into handling that gun can take care of Louie as an accessory, and we'll sweat the rest of it out of Louie himself, so you can still stay out of it like you wanted to all along." He chuckled. "Pretty neat, the way you worked it. Our fellows have waded through more dirty wash since Tuesday morning. . . ."

"But wait a minute," I said, puzzled. "How'd you know I was the one worked it? How'd you know that the collar was planted?"

He winked at me good-naturedly. "You held it to her mouth upside down. The cleft of the upper lip was at the bottom." He chuckled. "What was he supposed to be doing while she was kissing him — standing on his head?"

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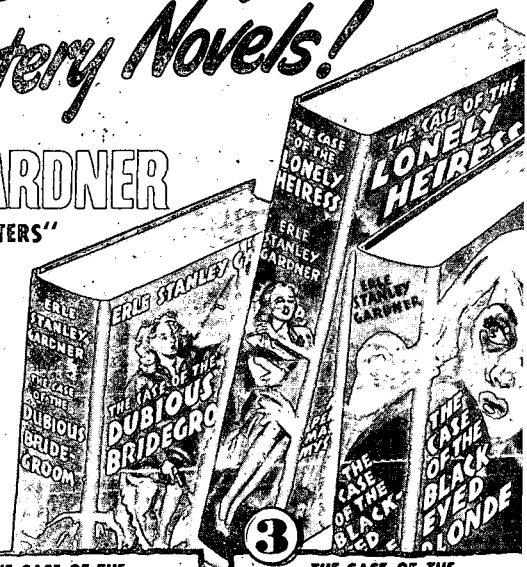

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